


BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

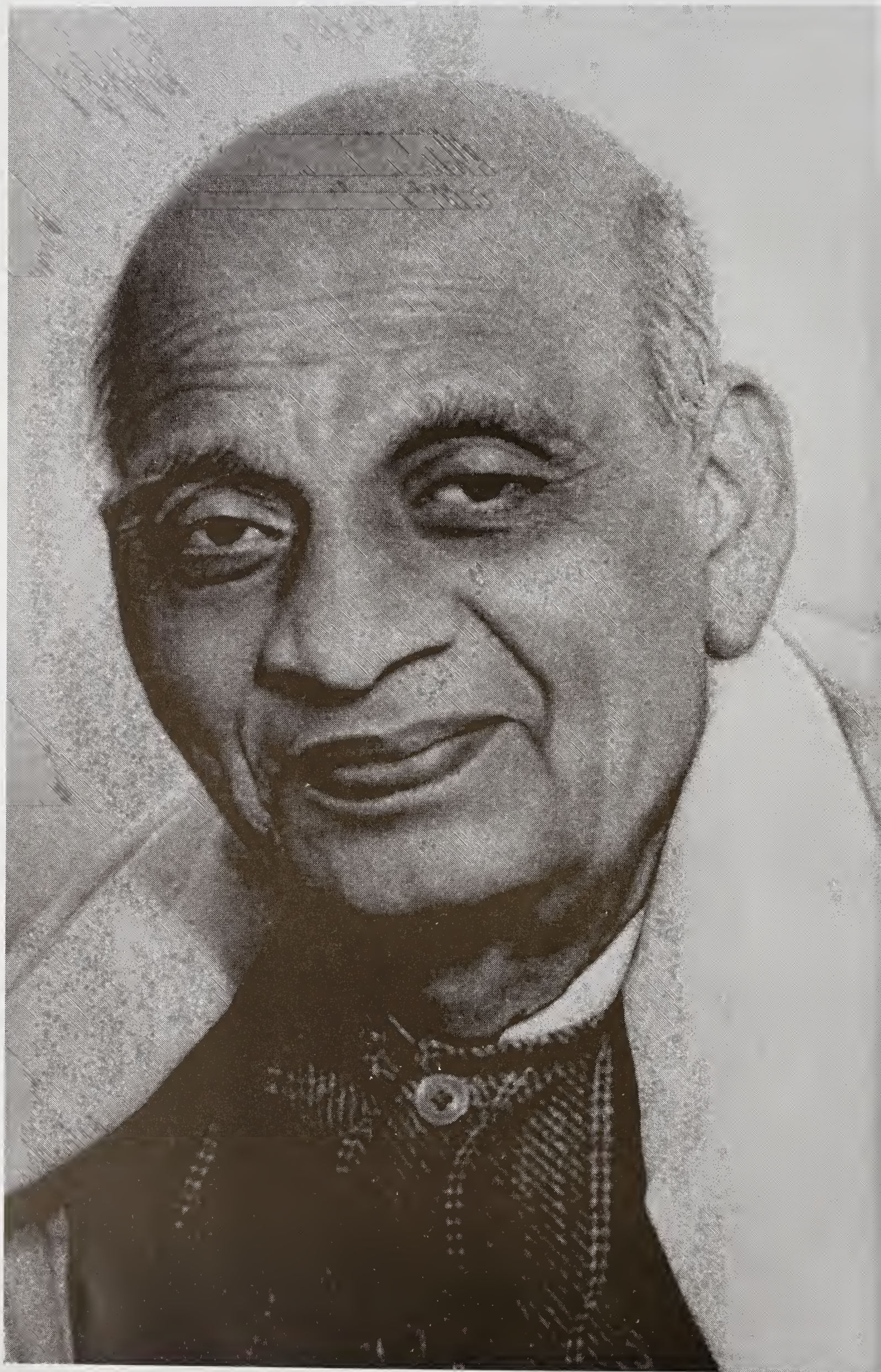
Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

I. J. Patel

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
Public.Resource.Org



Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

**Sardar
Vallabhbhai Patel**

I. J. Patel



**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

First Print : 1985 (*Saka 1906*)
Third Reprint : 2015 (*Saka 1936*)



© Author



ISBN 978-81-230-1973-4

BMI-ENG-REP-053-2014-15

Price : ₹ 135.00

Published by the Additional Director General, Publications Division,
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India,
New Delhi-110 003

Website: <http://www.publicationsdivision.nic.in>

Editing : Roma Chatterjee

Cover Design : Gajanan P. Dhope

*Photographs courtesy : Photo Division, Ministry of Information and
Boardcasting; Nehru Memorial Museum & Library*

Sales Centres : • Ambica Complex, 1st Floor, Paldi, **Ahmedabad-380007**
• 1st Floor, 'F' Wing, Kendriya Sadan, Koramangala, **Bangalore-560034**
• 'A' Wing, Rajaji Bhawan, Besant Nagar, **Chennai-600090** • Hall No.
196, Old Secretariat, **Delhi-110054** • Soचना Bhavan, CGO Complex,
Lodhi Road, **New Delhi-110003** • House No. 7, New Colony, Chenikuthi,
K.K.B. Road, **Guwahati-781003** • Block No. 4, 1st Floor, Gruhakalpa
Complex, M.G. Road, Nampally, **Hyderabad-500001** • 8, Esplanade East,
Kolkata-700069 • Hall No.1, 2nd Floor, Kendriya Bhawan, Sector-H,
Aliganj, **Lucknow-226024** • 701, B-Wing, Kendriya Sadan, CBD Belapur,
Navi Mumbai-400614 • Bihar State Co-operative Bank Building, Ashoka
Rajpath, **Patna- 800004** • Press Road, Near Govt. Press,
Thiruvananthapuram-695001

Typesetter : Quick Prints, Naraina, New Delhi-110 028.

Printed at : Viba Press Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi-110 020.

ABOUT THE SERIES

The objective of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who were instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies are not available.

The series is planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people, giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life, time and activities of these eminent leaders. The volumes do not intend either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

PREFACE

Sardar Patel was one of those who inspired me to a life of social service and dedicated work. As a tribute to him as well as to provide young people with an ideal, I wrote his biography in Gujarati. The same was very well received and later was translated into Hindi.

When therefore, I received an invitation from the Publications Division, Government of India, for writing the same in English, I readily accepted as it was a golden opportunity to let the Great man be known to a wider reading public.

He was a pillar of strength to India and will always be remembered for the unique and unparalleled services he rendered to the nation. He was great as a freedom fighter and proved himself greater as a statesman and administrator. He was a man of rare qualities, the like of him, it is difficult, to decipher.

But for the incessant and untiring assistance given by Sarvashri V.J. Trivedi and H.K. Solanki, I should admit, it would not have been possible for me to have this English version ready in its present form.

I cannot forget the assistance of Shri B.T. Pathan, who sacrificed his moments of leisure to prepare the manuscript.

I am thankful to Prof. Mohanbhai Patel who scrutinised the manuscript in its final stage and made important suggestions.

I am grateful to the Publications Division for entrusting me with this biography.

I.J. PATEL

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. Child is the Father of Man	7
2. Farmers' Sardar	12
3. Training at the Hands of Gandhiji	23
4. A Lion's Cub	32
5. An Apostle of Non-Cooperation	41
6. Work is Worship	49
7. Constructive Work	65
8. India's Sardar	74
9. I Can Live on Air	81
10. Parental Affection	92
11. A Strict Custodian	97
12. Land Will Come Back Knocking Our Doors	105
13. Self-Sacrifice	111
14. Facing Death Bravely	117
15. A Statesman Par Excellence	123
16. 'O Lord, I Am In Your Hands'	135
Chronology	138

Introduction

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel : Portrait of a Statesman

The History of India would have been differently written had Sardar Patel not been the Deputy Prime Minister when India became independent in 1947. The triumvirate, Gandhiji, Nehru and Sardar Patel — the benevolent triumvirate it has been often called — was responsible for giving direction to the destiny of the country. Gandhiji won the independence for the country, Pandit Nehru gave foreign policy a shape and strength and Sardar Patel consolidated the country into one united whole in a unique manner. A man of iron will and absolute fearlessness, Sardar Patel set about the task as Home Minister without fear or favour. He was one of those few men who knew what he wanted and knew also how to get it. A man with a superb knowledge of human nature — its strength and its weaknesses and an uncanny perception for sizing up human beings — Sardar Patel tackled the question of 550 and odd States and principalities in a masterly strategic manner which left even his wildest critics in complete amazement. Almost within a year he redrew the map of India with every princely State joining the Indian Union and thus forming part of the political stream of life that was endowed with unity as it was already endowed with a cultural unity and harmony. Even if Sardar Patel had not done anything else, his name would have been written in golden letters in Indian history for the future generations to take inspiration from. The surprising fact is that even though he took away everything from the Princes, the Princes never complained of any ill-treatment or any injustice from a person who never spared them from trenchant criticism all his life. On the contrary they praised with one voice the generosity Sardar Patel had shown to them in manners, political, financial and so on. Whether he was a

king of a big state or small, he treated each of them with kindness, consideration and fairplay that captivated the hearts of all those who came to scoff but remained to pray. Sardar's greatness lay in the fact that his sworn enemies turned into the most trustworthy admirers.

But Sardar Patel had other facets of life which are equally inspiring and worth emulating. His physical courage at the time of his operation has very few parallels in the history of this land. His sacrifice of his legal practice and the power and the position that accompany such practice, can be a torch-bearer for anyone who wants to serve the nation. But apart from his personal attributes, the integrity and singleness of purpose with which he served the cause of the farmers at Bardoli and Ras and other places is equally admirable. The Sardar had an iron determination which enabled him to see clearly the goals that the nation should have for itself. As a peasant, he was a realist par excellence. He went to the heart of the matter and wasted no time in searching the core, the centre of the problems that affected the country. His insight was clear; his understanding precise; his method straightforward. Naturally he could solve the problems of the farmers even with the British in a manner which left the foreign rulers agape. Any one who studies the history of the peasant movement in Gujarat will be convinced that, but for the extraordinary practical vision and perspicacity of Sardar Patel, the movement would have floundered. Not only was he courageous, he inspired courage in others as well. Not only did he resist the British in the tax collecting campaign but he convinced the farmers that their development lay in resisting it. And he organised this struggle in a manner that brought complete victory to the farmers. It was in this struggle that the organisational capacity for which Sardar Patel became famous in the whole country was visible. There was hardly a problem which the Congress faced and which could not be solved by Sardar Patel quickly and skilfully. He knew where to yield just as he knew also where not to give in. This ability to give and take, is a characteristic of his whole life. But this 'give and take' was never at the cost of a principle or the organisation he served or at the cost of integrity. He was equally concerned with the manner of granting things as also the way in

which he got things done. He trusted the trustworthy fully and they in turn reciprocated the trust by giving a life-time bond of love and readiness to sacrifice. And by happily blending trust and honour, the Sardar could achieve a firm organisation and lay the foundation for the Congress as well as for the country. It was often said that the Sardar was ruthless but he was ruthless only when situations required it, otherwise like all great men, he had a heart of gold, whether in peace or in struggle, whether at work or at leisure, the Sardar rarely forgot the common men and women whom he knew, whom he loved and whom he trusted. Whether it was bringing up of a friend's son or getting work for the son of his office clerk or looking after the health of his relatives or sending in a telegram of congratulations on the marriage of a friend's daughter — in all these the Sardar showed his humanity and his love for the people. Stern in appearance and rugged in countenance, the Sardar could, only if he would, inspire fear in others. But that was not the way he worked. He always tried to convince others as he did not tackle any problem in a light-hearted manner. He took the problems of the country seriously and his only aim was to see that the country which was already partitioned, remained intact and this he achieved gloriously.

The Sardar also had a constructive side to his nature which operated in the social work that he undertook. Whether as President of the Ahmedabad Municipality or as a worker for the cause of the Harijans or the conduct of Ashrams and schools for the benefit of the poor children, the Sardar went about his work with a quiet determination that would attract any one's attention even today. The way that he waded in waters by day or in the night during the floods in Ahmedabad and the way the relief works were organised during and after the floods, did earn him a name as a humanitarian administrator. And this he did, not by spending tonnes of money but by a sense of thrift which is one of the characteristics of a good farmer. And the Sardar was truly a farmer's son. There was hardly any wastage of money in the relief works organised by Patel not only in Ahmedabad but in the entire State. The way in which he organized the work of Ashrams for Harijans and their schools is noble indeed. In 1934 when Gandhiji wanted funds to be raised for

the cause of the Harijans, it was the Sardar who raised them. This side of his work has hardly been emphasized and spoken about as it really should have been. The Sardar was a constructive worker worth emulating and no one can easily hold a candle to him on this aspect of his personality. So great has been the impact of Vallabhbhai on civic affairs in Ahmedabad and Gujarat that even today a relief committee functions for Gujarat every time that it is engulfed in some natural or even man-made disaster. That the committee works almost thirty years after his death in the same unswerving spirit of dedicated service to humanity, is the result of the Sardar's vision.

However, the sense of transparent integrity that the Sardar had also been often lost sight of. Who in this wide world, would expect a father to remain away from his son's home at the time of his death? Little do people know and little have they realised that having found out that his name was used by his son for supposedly selfish ends, the Sardar, during his last days in Bombay, did not even visit his house. It was at a friend's house that he breathed his last. What more shining example can you have of the honesty of a man to whom sacrifice, honesty and firmness of purpose and the holiness of means were virtues to be cultivated.

One might as well imagine that the Sardar was engrossed in the affairs of the country only. Such a view would be lop-sided. The Sardar knew foreign affairs as well as anybody. But he had full faith in Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The fidelity that he owed to the mother institutions move him to follow Panditji both in letter and spirit and yet within the framework of the constitution, he aired his views as frankly and freely as was expected of a great leader. But like a true soldier, he abided by the decisions of the Prime Minister no matter whether he agreed with them or not; nor did he create any crisis. He was ardently concerned with the task of getting along and seeing that the country developed as quickly as it could. He knew that time was against him as his own health stood shattered. It was by hard work and sacrifice that he solved the problems that came his way. He utilised every opportunity with a single-minded purpose which left no room for complacency. He knew that

independence was one thing but growth and development of the country another. Whatever be our directions, we have to be realistic and mobilise all our services to see that the poor in the country had the share of this development. In this adventure of building new India he sought the cooperation of the steel frame — the former I.C.S. officers and won them over completely and they responded to his call to serve the country whole-heartedly.

The Sardar argued with all those who were against the I.C.S. on the simple plane of practicality. It is not given to most people to be unselfish and self-sacrificing. There can be compelling reasons for the behaviour of the people at various times and in various circumstances. But in the changed circumstances if people or servants are given an opportunity to react differently then an attempt must be made to find out whether a changed reaction has set in. This the Sardar amply did by showing a new way of serving the country both to the I.C.S. and to the Native States.

It is easy to say that the Sardar was a supporter of capitalists. The truth is that the Sardar was a supporter of the country and the common man in more than one sense. He was a socialist to the core. If socialism consists in not having wealth then Sardar was a socialist. Vitthalbhai, his brother, had money to make a will about; the Sardar made no will because he had no money to leave to any one. If this is not socialism what is it? If uplift of the Harijans and the farmers is not socialism, what is it? Innumerable questions like this can be posed and the answer to all of them will have only one burden; the tilling millions of India who loved the Sardar as he loved and stood by them as a sign of socialism truly.

Many a leader had differences with the Sardar, in his approach to men and affairs. Many have been the criticism often voiced against him in the past and are still being voiced today, for a number of things that he did and a number of things that he did not do but none has had the temerity to question the bonafides of the Sardar though like all great men, he never explained his conduct to others. He allowed his deeds to speak for himself. He did not need a biography to extol virtues of his life when he was alive. He echoed a Greek proverb when he told at a public meeting that a person

should be judged only after his death. He does not need it even today. But the world being what it is and those who did have an opportunity to know him and the younger generations who have often never read anything about him, require to be told about this hard-headed but soft-hearted man from Karamsad who lived a life of austerity, penance and simplicity. He never boasted of any deep learning though he was quite learned as a lawyer. Very few people know that he passed his Bar Examination in London with such rare distinction that he was granted one term in advance. If that was not so, he would rarely have been able to achieve in the legal field the results that he did. He did not have time to cultivate the sense for the fine arts or music. But those who are of the earth listen to the music of the earth and as Keats said: 'The poetry of the earth is never dead'. One can say without any fear of contradiction that the Sardar listened to the music of the earth and spent his life in nursing it so that it can flower forth to bring about a homogeneous growth for the common men. In this perspective John Gunther's remarks in 'Inside Asia'* about him sound puerile. If his only culture was 'agriculture' even then there was nothing wrong about it. For, all culture including industrial culture rests on agriculture even in the modern world. The Sardar did not put on any airs about himself. He was often blunt, often forthright, often terribly 'cuffing'. He did not mince words and said what he wanted to, in clear terms. He may not have cultivated a grace of language but he could express his thoughts with a pointed and a telling phrase which would reach the innermost heart even of a farmer. The Sardar lived a life which can be an inspiration to all those who would want to serve the country. None would be poorer for reading his life and the work that he did. None would withhold praise after he had studied what the Sardar was and what he stood for and what he achieved. The unfolding of his life in the following pages is merely a brief statement of what he was and what he did. It would require many volumes to depict the Sardar as a man of destiny and in him the destiny of the country linked itself with the destiny of his life. And how he achieved his destiny can always read like a well-planned odyssey in pre and post independent India.

Child is the Father of Man

Vallabhbhai was born in 1875 probably on October 31, in a farmer's family. He was proud of being a farmer and very often in public life he styled himself as one. He bore all the traits of a farmer : a spirit of independence and self-reliance, straightforwardness in speech, obliging by nature, practical to the core : possessing a hard commonsense and an extraordinary understanding of men and matters. This he inherited from his father, Zaverbhai who was a small farmer so independent of nature that the whole village looked upon him with respect and he solved everyone's problems without fear or favour even of his kith and kin. He was a devout follower of the religious leader and social reformer Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He spent most of his days in the Swaminarayan temple and later in life visited his home once a day for lunch only. He used to have only one meal a day.

His mother Ladbai was an equally devout and self-effacing lady who reared her four sons and one daughter in the meagre income that the family had. She used to follow the religious prescriptions of fasting and praying and every evening narrated to her offsprings stories from the epics or sang *bhajans* and prayers.

It is reported that Zaverbhai participated in the 1857 struggle for independence under the Rani of Jhansi and was later arrested by the Holkar of Indore. The then Holkar had a curious habit of keeping his prisoners bound hand and feet all within his view. It is reported that once when the Prince was playing chess, he made a wrong move which Zaverbhai, the prisoner, corrected. The Prince was so pleased that he released Zaverbhai who returned to Karamsad after three years of absence.

Like father, like son, just as Zaverbhai knew how to take the right move to win a game, so also Vallabhbhai knew equally well how to organise successfully a court case, a no-tax campaign, a municipal election or any election for that matter, a Congress session, a Khadi campaign, a prohibition programme or a fund-raising activity.

It must be acknowledged to the credit of Zaverbhai and Ladbai that they trained their offsprings in the school of poverty so well and so nicely that they gave to the nation two great leaders—Vitthalbhai and Vallabhbhai, both of whom were unrivalled in their own spheres. Both never knew what is fear, what is selfishness, what is cowardice and both had mastered the art and craft of accepting every challenge and seeing the challenge through successfully. They succumbed to no lures, no greed, no temptations to power, position or self but stuck to their duty and performed it without fear or favour to anybody. If Vitthalbhai was a terror to the I.C.S. steel frame and hard-headed bureaucracy as well as the Governor-General and his cabinet in Delhi, Vallabhbhai simultaneously was a terror to the then bureaucracy and the Governor of the Bombay Presidency. On the other hand, the way, both of them, particularly Vallabhbhai organised flood-relief in 1928 in Gujarat, earned the praise of their arch adversaries. These capacities of constructive work together with raising one's head against all injustices is something that is genuine to a son of the soil. These were lessons of poverty which both the brothers learnt and learnt them well, the hard way.

Vallabhbhai used to help his father on the farm right from infancy and attend village school for his primary education. One of the teachers in the school could not bear any questions or doubts raised by the pupils and he always instructed them to learn themselves, or from one another. Sardar imbibed this very well and throughout his life, took to self-learning and self-reliance. Another teacher used to beat his pupils with a cane on the slightest excuse and very often mercilessly. Vallabhbhai, the infant, bore this for a while patiently but with anger burning in his heart. One day the limit was reached and he organised a *Hizarat* — self-

evacuation as a mark of protest. He led his co-pupils out of the class and then the whole school and organised their self-study in the *dharamshala* where he provided drinking water and other facilities. For three days the village boys went to the *dharamshala* and not to the school. The Headmaster was a man of understanding. He called Vallabhbhai and assured him that nothing of the sort would be repeated. On that assurance, he led the pupils back to the school. This perhaps was his mini experience in organising a protest against ill-treatment which is reflected later in his successful organisation of a number of no-tax campaigns and non-cooperation movements.

After finishing his schooling at Karamsad, he had to go to Petlad for further High school education. He organised a group of colleagues, who would bring their weekly rations every Sunday from home and organise their own cooking and other boarding and lodging facilities. This group of 'seven' as it was known, reminds us of the spirit of the poem "We are Seven", Sardar knew how to knit together, loyal friends and faithful followers. This experience also gave him an insight in sorting out the truthful from the untruthful, the faithful from the flatterers, one sees the seeds of Sardar's incomparable capacity to know people thoroughly and not to be led away by chatterers and theoreticians in this childhood experience.

Another incident of his school days which reveals his character to stand against unjustifiable actions happened when he was at Baroda. The teacher gave an imposition to write a hundred times an arithmetical table. This would lead to no learning. Sardar did not carry it out and the teacher went on increasing from day to day the number of times the table should be scribbled. In Gujarati it is called *Pada*. *Pada* has another meaning in Gujarati viz., the buffalo. When the teacher one day gave a final warning, he very amusingly but calmly replied that he had driven that he-buffalo all the way to the school but it ran away at the sight of so many boys. The teacher got angry and asked him to leave the class. Vallabhbhai approached the Headmaster and explained the unreasonableness

of mere scribbling which leads to no learning but would generate a hatred of learning.

Once when he wanted to change his language, the teacher taunted him and he had the bluntness to retort to the teacher and bring home to him the reality of the situation that he, the teacher, would lose his job if there were no students like him.

Sardar could never tolerate somebody bullying over others or somebody trying to exploit others. He perhaps thought that the best profession for him, where he could maintain his independence and still earn his livelihood, was a lawyer's. Hence he prepared himself for a District Pleader's examination and after passing it, started practice in Godhra, where his elder brother Vitthalbhai had created an arch-enemy in a local teacher who would pursue Vallabhbhai also with a vengeance. For every lawyer the beginning is very difficult. He got a case which was *prima facie* weak. It involved visiting the spot of the incident. The judge, the opposing lawyer, Vallabhbhai, all started in a cart to inspect the site. On the way, to spend their leisure, the judge and the opposing lawyer, started pricking Vallabhbhai as a briefless barrister and how he could accept a brief so weak as this out of sheer want and incapacity. Vallabhbhai did not open his mouth at all, and that was his great strength and character. He would always listen and draw his own conclusions while keeping his mouth shut, if circumstances demanded. Next day when the case opened, Vallabhbhai shrewdly narrated the talk they had the previous day in the cart journey and had the uncommon courage to allege that the judge was prejudiced and hence his case be transferred to some other court. That, not only, brought the judgement in his favour but also brought a host of clients in his favour.

All his life he never suffered any obstacles and never stopped till he removed them. The germ is found in an incident of his school life. When Vallabhbhai and his friends walked their way to Petlad school every Monday, they had to cover a path that was not smooth. He once found a sizable stone as a stumbling block while the rest of the company went ahead, he took pains to dig out and remove the stone. When the company found him missing, they stopped

and asked him why he was detained. He calmly told them how he had removed the stone. In his chequered public life, we know how he overcame obstacles all the way and led every struggle he handled to a successful end.

In spite of his bluntness and his outward roughness, he was very reverent but still overspoken. One day when Vallabhbhai was thirty years old, and practising at Baroda, his father turned up without any intimation. Vallabhbhai was smoking his hookah. He put it aside, rose up and said, “Motakaka, why did you take the trouble to come? I could have come to Karamsad instead.” The father explained how a warrant was under issue against the Swaminarayan Maharaj, Yagna Purushottamdasji as a sequel to some temple property dispute. It was characteristic of Vallabhbhai to bring home to everybody the weaknesses in his own way and then leave it there in case of people whom he revered. He immediately explained. “A warrant against the Maharaj? He is the incarnation of God Purushottam and how dare anyone even think of arresting such a person who has the power of setting us free from the bonds of this world?” He saw that it was settled amicably. Similar was his reverence for Mahatma Gandhi. Many people used to accuse Sardar to be a blind follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Even Vitthalbhai did so. But those who have read Mahadev Desai’s Diary and the daily conversations between Mahatma and Sardar, would realise that he always brought to the notice of the Mahatma where he thought, the foible lay but then left it to him. Great and deep was his reverence for the Mahatma because he believed firmly that the only person who could free the country from bondage and slavery was the Mahatma who had the courage to implement what he thought was proper and necessary for his country and countrymen.

Vallabhbhai inherited from his parents an unbounded sense of devotion, dedication, selflessness, courage of conviction and ability to devise a strategy for successful completion of any cause. The child is the father of the man is amply demonstrated from Sardar’s life.

Farmers' Sardar

The Bardoli Taluka, Formerly a part of the District is known for its fertile lands and progressive farmers. It became famous in 1928 because of the Bardoli Satyagraha. The resoluteness of its farmers, their endurance, their preparedness for total self-sacrifice and the collective conception of silent opposition forced the mighty British to change its unreasonable decision. The man who inspired confidence in these docile farmers was none other than their revered leader the Sardar, the Sardar of the Nation, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The land revenue assessment in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency was revised every thirty years on the basis of the economic conditions of the farmers. The last survey of this kind was carried out in 1896 and, therefore, another survey fell due in 1926. Government in its own way through its officers and lower revenue cadre considered the question of assessment and somewhat with a view to harrasment, decided upon an increase of about 30 per cent in the land revenue. The reasons given for this increase were increase in the population of the Taluka, its cattle wealth, its pukka houses, its bullock-carts, increase in the prices of cotton and foodgrains, spread of education, etc, which had resulted in an improvement of the conditions of the Raniparaj community.

The people of Bardoli had expressed their firm resolve to launch a civil disobedience movement, when Mahatma Gandhi had given a call in 1921 but in view of the violence in Chauri Chaura (Assam), Gandhiji had suspended this agitation and asked the workers to devote themselves to constructive work for the uplift of the people. After Gandhiji's imprisonment even in an atmosphere of despondency, trusted workers camped in the Taluka and

organised the people, so that when this increase in land revenue assessment was declared, a committee under Shri Narharibhai Parikh was formed to consider the reasonableness of this increase. This committee went into all the aspects and details of the situation and proved that the increase was not reasonable. Requests were made to Government through members of the Legislative Assembly from the District and after cultivating public opinion, an appeal was made to the Government but to no avail. The people, therefore, approached Sardar with the idea of civil disobedience movement. It was characteristic of Sardar that whatever he took on hand, he would examine all the aspects of the question, cross-question the representationists and take a decision only if he was convinced that the case was strong enough. He drew their attention to the risks involved in the civil disobedience movement inquired whether they were prepared for self-annihilation and on being satisfied, took a decision to launch the civil disobedience movement. Final permission was required from Mahatmaji. Gandhiji had full faith in the insight of Sardar in these matters and, therefore, since Sardar had already taken a decision, Mahatmaji said : "I only wish victory to Gujarat."

On February 4, 1928, a convention of the farmers of eighty villages was held under the Presidentship of Sardar. In his characteristic way he told them in all seriousness; "You cannot treat me lightly. I am not prepared to undertake anything which does not involve a risk. I am prepared to stand by those who are willing to take risks. The question is not of one Taluka but of numerous others plus several Districts. If you lose, the future of all will be spoiled."

After the convention, he wrote a letter to the Governor suggesting to hold in abeyance the increase in land revenue and to reconsider the matter afresh. The Governor sent a curt reply to the effect that the letter was forwarded to the Revenue Department for disposal. When a proper reply was not received from the Government, Sardar called the leaders of the villages of Bardoli. On every occasion of collective struggle, Sardar used to test everyone, distribute responsibility to everyone and work with the

collective support. Such was his democratic procedure. He did not wish that people should carry on a struggle on his own personal strength. Therefore, he cross-questioned them and after warning them, added : “There are many dangers involved in this movement. It is better not to undertake a work involving risk but if one decides to undertake it, one must see that it is completed successfully; if you are defeated, the prestige of the country will be lost; if you are strong enough the whole country will benefit. If you are under an impression that you have got a fighter like Vallabhbhai, on whose strength you want to carry on the struggle, then better not start the struggle, because if you break down, rest assured, you will not be able to lift your head again for a hundred years. Whatever you want to resolve, you have to decide yourself. Therefore, think over the matter fully, understand it properly and then decide what you wish to do.”

After this, the leaders of the Choryasi Taluka came to Sardar. There was an increase in the land revenue in this Taluka also. The stand he took then reveals his clear-headed pragmatic approach to the problem. He said “Bardoli Satyagraha will not help Bardoli only. The case of Choryasi Taluka will also be covered without any special effort. Besides, 40 to 50% of the farmers of Surat and Rander are rich and can be pressurised by the Collector and the Commissioner. Once they pay up the revenue, you will get frightened. How can I land you upon this type of danger? We should cut our coat according to the cloth. Rest assured whatever happens in Bardoli will be applicable to you. It is quite certain.” He thus decided to concentrate all the energy of his colleagues in the Satyagraha and addressing a big rally said in the end: “ The question is not of a few lakhs of rupees of 37½ lakhs of rupees for thirty years but one of right and wrong. It is a question of self-respect.” Reverting to the main theme, he added, “No one in this government ever listens to the farmers and we have to fight against this.”

The three members of the Legislative Assembly from this Taluka were present in the rally and they expressed their faith and happiness in the leadership of Vallabhbhai.

Thus after taking into confidence the people, he resolved to launch the Satyagraha. In order to ensure that the people were not misled, did not lose courage, maintained unity and remained strong and determined. He sent out trained and trusted workers to different places and established camps there to boost their morale, arranged for battle songs and songs of valour to be sung in chorus. To enlist the support of the women folk he enjoined women workers to go round and work for it. When the Satyagraha began the season for marriages had approached. For the people in villages this is a season of joy and celebrations but if people got lost in this, the force of the movement would abate. As a watchful leader, he brought out a pamphlet warning the people : "One cannot afford to celebrate marriages if one has to fight a battle. Soon you will have to lock your houses and roam about in your fields from dawn to dusk. You will have to lead a camp life. The rich and the poor of all communities alike must work in unison and cohesion. We do not want to pay even a single penny to the government. We should be firm in that decision, otherwise life will become worthless and the Talukas will be burdened for all time to come."

The Government in a letter, noting the popularity of Sardar stated that the people should not suffer at the instigation of outsiders.

One of the characteristics of Sardar is discernible in his reply to this letter. He was not afraid of any one and was habituated to tell the truth even to the highest officers. Thanking the Government for the threat conveyed in its letter, he replied in a telling manner, "You appear to regard me and my colleagues as outsiders. I am merely trying to help my own people. You are upset because I am trying to expose you and seem to forget that you are speaking on behalf of a government which is composed mainly of outsiders. Let me make it clear that though I am entitled to consider myself a resident of Bardoli as much as of any other part of India, I have come here only at the request of these people who are in distress. It is open to them to ask me to clear out at any time. How much nicer would it have been if it was equally easy for them to dispense with the band of foreigners who have been sucking their blood

and maintaining themselves in power by force of armies?" Mr. Smith, Secretary, Revenue Department wrote a still more nasty letter to Sardar. The irony was that while Mr. Smith was carrying on correspondence with the Sardar in an insolent manner, the then Finance Minister of Bombay Sir Chunilal Mehta on February 28, 1928 praised the services rendered by this 'outsider' in flood relief work thus : "Today Mahatama Gandhi must be very happy that he has been able to achieve the object of creating a band of selfless social workers devoted to social reform and Sardar Patel had deputed for him in an able manner."

On February 15, 1928, the Government served notices imposing fines on several weak Bania land holders. At some places, the Talatis extracted money from Raniparaj farmers by beating them up. At other places, through flattery and personal relations, they requested the Bania merchants to pay up the amount. The Government adopted different methods for collecting the amount.

Against all this, the keen-eyed Sardar started building a strong organisation. He kept himself informed of all the developments happening all over the Taluka. After which he arranged public discussions. He conveyed to one of the businessmen who was under pressure to pay up, to tell the Talati that if he was really so respectful towards him he should resign his job for the sake of his honour. Those who stand by the people in times of their difficulties are the real officers, the others are only *hawaldars*. With his guidance and public speeches, he involved the people in the struggle. Knowing the pulse of the people, he gave them in appropriate measures, encouragement and courage. In one of his lectures he said : "Because of fear you have become very soft and you tend to avoid unnecessary quarrels but you cannot afford to be so soft as not to fight any injustice. That is sheer cowardice. No one cares to inquire who I am when I move about in the villages at night. Ravishanker Maharaj tells me that in your Taluka not a dog barks at strangers, and not a buffalo attacks anybody. You suffer from an overdose of decency. Have some pride and learn to fight for justice and against injustice". As Satyagraha progressed, some persons fell victims to Government intrigues and threats. Vallabhbhai then

gave a subtle definition of non-cooperation and boycott, which shows his clear-sightedness. Not to take help from some one is non-violent boycott but not to render service to some one is violent boycott. Not to go for meals to one who has been boycotted, not to attend marriage functions at his place, not to deal with him commercially, not to take his help is non-violent boycott, but if one who is boycotted has taken ill, then not to look after him, not to allow a doctor to go to his place, if there is a death in his family not to render assistance in the funeral ceremony, to keep him away from the use of wells and temples, that is violent boycott. People now realised the skill of Sardar, his courage, his ability to enter the hearts of the village people. People got as it were a new sense of life. Government served 'Khalsa' notices for which they selected one Sheth Virchand Chenaji of Bajipara and seven big farmers of Valod. In the meantime the movement had gathered such momentum that Sheth Virchand wrote a letter to the 'Mahalkari'* : "You have selected me to be the first to be served a 'Khalsa' notice on the assumption that I am the weakest of all but till justice is done no one is going to pay up the amount and nor am I going to do so. On the basis of our relations and social links, as a well-wisher of yours, I advise you that if the lands of the farmers are to be confiscated at your hands it would be more dignified for you to resign the job."

April 12, 1928 was the dead-line given by the Government in the 'Khalsa' notice but it had no effect. The 'Times of India' of Bombay noted that "the Satyagraha was not abating. It will take some time before the effect of the 'Khalsa' notices is felt. Once that happens, the entire movement will collapse".

Meanwhile the attention of the people outside Gujarat was drawn to the Bardoli Satyagraha. The Bombay Presidency Association in spite of the fact that it was not committed towards this movement, passed an encouraging resolution. On the other side, the Government officers became impatient to collect the amount by any means - fair or foul. Their activities came to the

* Officer in charge of a sub-division of a Taluka.

knowledge of Sardar and in rustic language, which the farmers cannot forget, he encouraged them. The force of the language and its relish is discernible in his lectures and could be relished even by the literary persons. There was a sort of a poetry in his prose. It will be better to furnish some examples from these speeches.

- (1) “A big earthen pot when broken gives a number of small pieces and one such piece is enough to break such a pot. So why should the piece be afraid of the pot? If any one has to be afraid of being broken, it is the pot and not the piece.
- (2) I want to teach you the law of nature. Being farmers you know that only after the seeds lose their existence, new crop is produced. If one can go to heaven without dying, then only we can get independence by passing resolutions in the Legislative Assembly.
- (3) When milk and water are mixed, they are inseparable when the milk boils, water in order to save milk steams out and gets burnt first and saves the milk by bringing it upwards. Immediately milk in order to save water overflows and tries to put out the fire. In the same way it is necessary that the farmers and the creditors unite and help each other. Be careful that no one tries to drive a wedge between you.
- (4) In the beginning some farmers told me that it was better to get up a little early, work a little harder and pay the increased land revenue, instead of undergoing all these sufferings. “What for such persons survive” asked the Sardar. “Is it not better that they die and get reborn as bullocks instead of their continuing the existence which is not different from a bullock? I am interested in seeing the people of Gujarat full of lustre. I tell Gujaratis that may be you are weak in body but we should be tigers and lions at heart. Have the courage in your heart to sacrifice yourself for your self-respect. These two things which you cannot buy even after spending lakhs of rupees, you will be able to achieve through this struggle.

Opportunity has come to your doors. You should consider it your good fortune that this additional burden of land revenue has been imposed on you.”

Shri Mahadevbhai writing about the words with which Sardar exhorted the farmers to develop courage said : “I had spent 24 hours with Sardar four years ago in Borsad, when he was directing this movement. Thereafter also I have heard his speeches many a times but the sharpness in his language and the anger in his eyes which I have witnessed this time were never seen before. The words expressed by him when he saw the lands being confiscated showed such anguish, as if his own body was cut to pieces. I have witnessed for the first time his independent and forceful command over this language, quite devoid of the influence of English language.”

About the way in which Sardar exhorted the farmers to develop courage and strength and self-respect, Ravishanker Maharaj in a speech observed : “Once when I saw Gandhiji, the question about appointment of the Principal of the Gujarat Vidyapith was being discussed. The discussion went on for a long time. So Vallabhbhai said, ‘If you cannot find anybody, then appoint me as the Principal. I will make the students forget what they have learnt.’ Everybody laughed at the ironical statement of Sardar. At that time, his qualification to be a Principal was laughed at but the same Principal (Sardar) has started a school for teaching 88,000 people of Bardoli. The Government had made people forget nationalism and lessons are being given to forget that Government. One who had taken lessons from a ‘Guru’ (Gandhiji), who has forgotten what he had learnt wrongly, such a person (Sardar) has become Principal of this national School.”

The Bardoli Satyagraha was in full swing. There was a meeting at Bardoli, when someone said that Vallabhbhai was the farmers' Sardar. Whoever heard this, acclaimed it and thus Vallabhbhai came to be known as the farmers' Sardar. That was natural also. Whoever heard his speeches during the Bardoli Satyagraha realised his sacrifice and heartfelt concern for the farmers. He had firsthand knowledge of the difficulties experienced by the farmers and the unforeseen calamities they had to face.

That the farmer is the pivot of the country was brought home to Vallabhbhai by Gandhiji in 1917-18. Immediately it became a forceful realization to Vallabhbhai. A philosopher like him realised what was necessary to improve the condition of the farmers. The first opportunity to serve the farmers came in Kheda and the other in Borsad but the opportunity which presented itself in Bardoli was unique.

In Kheda, Vallabhbhai was a soldier under the leadership of Gandhiji and, therefore, he did not speak much. The Borsad struggle was of farmers but it did not emanate from the general difficulties of the farmers. Land revenue is the main question for the farmers. He strongly believed that if one has to serve the farmers of Gujarat, it was necessary to solve the complicated question of land revenue. This opportunity came to him in Bardoli. During discussion about Bardoli, Gandhiji asked him whether the grievance of the farmers of Bardoli was genuine? He replied : “Even if I had not read the articles of Narharibhai, I am quite convinced that their grievances are genuine because in India and particularly in Gujarat the grievances of the farmers in respect of land revenue cannot be otherwise”.

He expressed his feelings about the farmers in one of his speeches : “The entire world depends upon farmers. The maintenance of the world depends firstly on farmers and secondly on labourers. Even then, the worst sufferers are these two, because these two suffer the hardships silently. The merchant would have his shop in a shade, would get an annual income of about 2000 rupees and does not have to pay any taxes but a farmer with only a land of one *vigha** has to maintain a bullock, a buffalo, and has to work like an animal alongside another animal, clean the dung during monsoon in muddy waters, sow paddy risking his hands being bitten by scorpion, incurs debt to buy seeds and if he cultivates some cotton and reaps it himself, he puts it into a cart, takes it to market for sale getting in return about 25 rupees, from which he has to pay the taxes to the Government.

* 5/8 of an acre.

I am ashamed to see that the farmers out of fear undergo difficulties and get kicked by the tyrants. I wish I can make the farmers bold and make them move about with self-respect. If I could do this much, I would not have lived in vain.”

The process of attachment was speeded up and cattle were being taken in attachment. These cattle were tied and were kept in the open without fodder or water. Consequently, all farmers decided that in order to avoid attachment, they should keep the houses locked and men and cattle should be confined therein. To spend days on end like this was not easy.

Shri Kanaiyalal Munshi visited this place and then in a letter addressed to the Governor said : “In order to save their dear cattle, for as many as three months, men, women and children have confined themselves along with their cattle in unhealthy houses. When I saw the darkness, dung and the stench, saw the pale cattle suffering from ulcers and the firm resolve of men, women and children to accept this confinement along with such cattle, I cannot help feeling that one could find a parallel to this crude policy only in the medieval history.”

In order to keep up the morale of the farmers in facing such inhuman sufferings Sardar used to indulge in humour. About the cattle staying in houses, he commented—we should be glad that by staying in the closed houses your buffaloes have become white like white ‘Memsahibs’. The farmers laughed heartily at this. An attachment officer who used to attach buffaloes and sell at nominal prices was nicknamed ‘Bhensadia tiger’.

In order to announce the approach of the attachment officers drums were put on the trees at the outskirts of the villages, and conches were blown. When the Government put a ban on this when Sardar was addressing one of the meetings at that time, the attached buffaloes in the police station just opposite, started bellowing. He humorously said : “Listen to the bellowing of these buffaloes. Reporters please note it down and report that in the police station of Valod the buffaloes deliver lectures. If you do not know what kind of administration this is, then listen to those buffaloes which are shouting that in this administration, justice has turned its face

and gone away.” Thus humouring the farmers, encouraging them to be bold he strengthened their organization.

In the meantime Shri Munshi resigned. Moderates like Pandit Kunzru, Thakkarbapa, Sardulsingh Caveesher, Shri Jayramdas Dolatram and other leaders visited Bardoli and made personal enquiries and started bringing pressure on the Government to accept the reasonable demands of the farmers.

On the other hand, arrests were also being made. Ravishanker Maharaj was the first person to be arrested. After that, the Government arrested Bhavanbhai, a very humble farmer from the village Nani Farod, and sentenced him to six months’ rigorous imprisonment. At that time, what the wife of this farmer said is noteworthy and reflects the moral courage of the people : “Bear in mind not speak a single soft word. Tell the jailor that he may make you suffer as much as he likes. Do not worry about me or the children. Have courage and reply boldly. At such time, we should give such replies that all those in government would remember for ever.”

The struggle reached such a stage that a newspaper like ‘Pioneer’ wrote boldly that one has to accept the main point to come to the conclusion that justice was on the side of the farmers. At last the British lion awoke. A settlement was reached through the intervention of Sir Chunilal Mehta and Rao Saheb Dadoobhai Desai. That was the victory of the farmers of Bardoli.

Of the three struggles conducted by Sardar at Nagpur, Borsad and Bardoli, this was the most difficult one. This struggle drew the attention of not only the entire country but also of the British Empire.

The direction of this struggle was entirely in the hands of Sardar. Once when Gandhiji came and was requested to address a meeting, he refused and said that the Sardar here is Vallabhbhai and, therefore, he alone can address a meeting. Vallabhbhai did not remain the Sardar of the farmers of Bardoli only. He became the beloved Sardar of the entire country.

Training at the Hands of Gandhiji

Since the time Vallabhbhai started practice as a barrister in Ahmedabad, he became famous as a leading lawyer. Criminal cases were his speciality. His income was also good and he lived in style. When his elder brother Vitthalbhai decided to enter the field of social service and politics, there was an understanding between the two brothers that Vallabhbhai should earn and maintain both the brothers. In 1915 Mahatma Gandhi established an Ashram in Kochrab and resided there.

By nature Vallabhbhai was for active work. He was not interested in long speeches. He had a grievance against the radicals as well as the moderates of those days, that while the radicals shout at the top of their voices the moderates speak softly but neither of them do anything more than making representations to the Government and when no reply was received, everybody kept quiet. Sardar neither believed in nor was interested in such futile efforts.

On the arrival of the Mahatmaji, many advocates from the public visited him. Sardar was at first critical of the Mahatma and used to criticize him that this barrister has come with a new fad. He wants to create a band of national workers by making them practice celibacy, cleaning latrines and separating chaff from the grains. Even when Gandhiji went to the Gujarat Club to speak about this work, Sardar did not leave his game of bridge.

Sardar became alert when on being requested to join the Gujarat Sabha and become its president, Gandhiji put forward a condition that instead of requesting or begging the Government for our rights, we should organise the people for obtaining our reasonable rights. The draft of the memorandum to be sent to Lord Montague about the amendment to the Government of India Act

prepared by Gandhiji was short but quite clear. Gandhiji took up the question of customs check-point at Viramgam and thereafter the problem of the poor farmers of 'Gali' in Champaran. It was then that Vallabhbhai realised that here was a man who did not believe in idle talk only but knows the reality of the situation, is prepared to take all the risks for the same and is fearless. Because of this, his attraction towards Mahatmaji increased and he realised that at last he had been able to find a 'Guru' he had been looking for.

In November 1917 the first Gujarat Political Conference was held in Godhra, under the Mahatmaji. Though the conference was of Gujarat, leaders from all over the country were invited. Vallabhbhai, Jinnah, Khaparde, Tilak and others were present. Gandhiji insisted that all leaders should speak in Gujarati, so that it would reach the people. No one spoke in English. Even Jinnah spoke in Gujarati. Apart from the establishment of this independent tradition, Gandhiji set aside another convention of such political conferences. At the outset, there used to be a resolution of loyalty towards the British Empire and the Crown, Gandhiji announced that this was not necessary adding that even the Britishers did not pass such resolutions at their own conferences.

In the resolutions passed at this conference one was about the removal of untouchability and for the follow-up of this resolution, it was decided to establish a Harijan Ashram. Mamasahab Phadke became its life member. The next resolution passed was on forced labour. The Government officers, particularly from the Revenue Department, when they were on tour used the services, of the cart-owners, potters, labourers and others without payment. The hardships caused to the poor farmers and labourers was unbearable. The conference passed a resolution for the abolition of this practice of forced labour.

Generally after passing resolutions, such conferences used to be adjourned. After a year, the conference met again and there were speeches and resolutions again. Gandhiji suggested that there should be an Executive Committee to take action during the year

in pursuance of the resolutions passed. Gandhiji became its President and Vallabhbhai and Indulal Yajnik its Secretaries. The headquarters of the Committee was at Ahmedabad. Sardar got interested in this work.

The resolution for the abolition of forced labour was an important one. From the people's point of view it was beneficial but it was severe for the government. Gandhiji advised that Vallabhbhai should write a letter to the Commissioner of the Northern Division, Mr. Pratt and then apprise the people of the same. The letter was to the effect that there was no legal force for this practice and it appeared to be illegal. But this practice was in force since many years and, therefore, if there was any administrative order or resolution of the government, it should be intimated to them. If their assumption that this practice was illegal was not correct then they should be so informed. If this practice was enforced illegally the conference has resolved to warn the people about it.

The Commissioner was not prepared for such a letter. 'Impudence' was the comment he made on this letter and consigned it to the wastepaper basket. The method of obtaining information adopted by Sardar was perfect. Through it, he came to know the fate of the letter. Gandhiji was at Champaran at that time and when he returned Sardar asked for his advice. Gandhiji accepted the fact that the action of the Commissioner was insulting but suggested sending a reminder patiently, which also met the same fate. Therefore, Sardar wrote a third letter according to the advice of Gandhiji to the effect that there was no explanation about the legality of the practice of forced labour from the Commissioner and, therefore, we will print and distribute pamphlets among the people warning them about the illegality of this practice and advising them to stop the same. In spite of this if there was any legal force behind this practice we should be informed of the same within ten days. Commissioner Pratt got very much annoyed. He called Sardar to meet him at an appointed time. Sardar replied that he did not see any necessity of meeting the Commissioner. If there was any legal force for this practice it should be made known.

Despite this if the Commissioner wanted to meet him, he should meet him at the office of the conference. This unexpected reply was too much for the Commissioner. Sardar got the pamphlets printed and distributed. There were several cases because of this and there was awakening among the people. As a consequence of this, there was a considerable decrease in the harassment due to forced labour.

At the end of 1917, plague broke out in Ahmedabad. Schools and colleges were closed and the people started migrating from Ahmedabad. Sardar, however, remained in the city. He supervised the arrangements for the treatment of the patients and the cleanliness of the city. In 1917-18 there was famine in Ahmedabad District and Sardar took up the relief work for the affected people and was congratulated by Gandhiji for the same. In 1918 there was an epidemic of influenza in Ahmedabad. At that time, Sardar established a special hospital in Bhagubhai Vanda and arranged to distribute medicines to the homes of the patients.

In 1927, floods hit Kheda District. The crop was damaged and Gujarat Sabha requested relief in land revenue. The Government reviewed the position and rejected the request. Then it was decided to carry out an agitation under the leadership of Gandhiji. It was during the Kheda Satyagraha that Sardar came entirely under the influence of Gandhiji and was trained under him.

Before giving a call for Satyagraha, all went into the details of the question. The M.L.A.s of Bombay Presidency, Shri Parekh and Shri Patel made inquiries. Mohanlal Pandya had produced a number of statements. Thakkarbapa had also inquired into the matter, met the Collector and the Commissioner and requested the postponement of recovery of land revenue. But the Government was adamant. It was then that Gandhiji advised the Gujarat Sabha that they should call upon the people of Kheda district not to pay land revenue. The members of the Executive Committee of the Gujarat Sabha who were of moderate views were not prepared to take the responsibility for the consequences. Gandhiji insisted that the decision should be taken unanimously. The Executive

Committee consisted mostly of advocates. They raised a number of points. For eight days they met daily in the evening at the residence of Sardar. Gandhiji was not satisfied with a majority decision. Ultimately except Shri Maganbhai Chaturbhai, all members agreed. When Maganbhai agreed to remain neutral, it was the Kheda Satyagraha he would require a full-time worker who should remain with him in Kheda district for the duration of the Satyagraha. Impressed by the ability of Gandhiji, Sardar agreed whole-heartedly to stay with Gandhiji in Kheda district during the movement.

He corresponded with the Government as advised by Gandhiji and met the Collector and the Commissioner. Gandhiji also met the Governor. From all quarters a stereotype reply was received and it was decided that there was no need to change the decision. On the other hand, the farmers were subjected to harassment. They were pressurised to pay up the land revenue at any cost. Gandhiji decided that the workers should themselves undertake a personal review of the crop production and satisfy themselves. For that it was decided to meet at Nadiad on April 14 at the residence of Shri Gokuldas Talati. Of the 400 villages to be covered by the survey, Vallabhbhai had a share of about 30.

Next day in the morning Vallabhbhai started his journey to the villages in an open bullock-cart. With him was Shri Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel. Vallabhbhai who ordinarily dressed in Western style, had put on a Hungarian cap, black coat and dhoti. When the two occupied their seats in the bullockcart, the journey began. Unfortunately, the driver of the bullock-cart had forgotten to fix up the wooden stand. Consequently as the bullock-cart increased its speed the wooden stand turned turtle and both of them fell off. They came out from under the wooden stand after much difficulty. The driver felt very sorry and asked for their pardon. All the three raised the wooden stand of the cart and tied it properly and restarted the journey. During this inquiry, Ravjibhai was very much impressed by the manner in which Sardar found out the facts. In spite of definite information collected accurately, the Government stuck to its own figures and, therefore, at a meeting of all the

farmers of Kheda district held on March 22 at Nadiad after an inspiring speech by Gandhiji the Satyagraha was inaugurated. In his speech Gandhiji had explained, in a quiet manner, the limitations of the Satyagraha, the rights of the farmers and the dangers to be faced in preserving their self-respect.

Next day a funny incident took place. The Mamlatdar of Kapadwanj Taluka had issued summons to a volunteer Bhulabhai Roopaji Shah that he was misleading the people in the matter of realisation of land revenue and instigating them, therefore, he should report to the Mamlatdar's office on March 26, 1918. Shri Bhulabhai Shah reported to the office of the Mamlatdar at the appointed time and Sardar appeared as a barrister on his behalf. Vallabhbhai made Bhulabhai give a statement explaining the case as a Satyagrahi. The Mamlatdar on seeing the Sardar was flabbergasted and decided in a hurry that no offence was committed in this case and that Bhulabhai was free to leave. Immediately, Sardar inquired of the Mamlatdar whether the Mamlatdar agreed that there was no offence involved in telling the people not to pay land revenue. The Mamlatdar replied, "Yes you may say whatever you like."

Generally in the meetings, it was Mahatmaji who used to deliver speeches but he had been to Indore and therefore, on March 30, 1918 Sardar addressed the meeting in the following words : "Unless one suffers hardships one cannot get happiness and even if he gets happiness without suffering, it does not last long. It befits the State if its citizens are strong and resolute. There is no point in the loyalty of the unworthy and the timid. The loyalty of only the fearless and self-respecting citizens gives prestige to the State.

No real benefit could be achieved with the help of money. Nor can it truly alleviate hardships. The hardships will be over only when we are able to change the system of government by undergoing hardships." Sardar had in him the qualities of a born-leader but in this struggle he conducted himself as a soldier. He spoke only when necessary but observed and tried to understand how Gandhiji carried on correspondence with government officers, in discussions how he tested the people and exhorted them, gave

them courage and even during the most severe struggle, how he kept the doors open for a settlement. Sardar absorbed in such a way the initiation, training and object lessons during this struggle that in a few years' time, he made Gandhiji quite confident about Gujarat. On the other hand, Gandhiji also watched Sardar carefully. On April 4, at Karamsad, the native place of Sardar, a meeting was held and the words expressed by Gandhiji about Sardar bear witness to this: "This village is of Vallabhbhai. Of course Vallabhbhai has still to be moulded and I feel that we will get the best out of him ultimately."

Vallabhbhai was also imbibing the lessons of Gandhiji. During the absence of Gandhiji a letter was received from the Commissioner Pratt that he wanted to meet the farmers of the District to explain them the stand of the Government. As a Satyagrahi, Vallabhbhai requested the farmers to do so and on April 12, a meeting of about 2000 farmers was held. Vallabhbhai was present at the meeting but allowed Mr. Pratt to express his views. Mr. Pratt threatened the farmers in his broken Gujarati, showed the dangers and indicated clearly that the Home-Rule League people did not have anything to lose but that it was the farmers who would be the losers. Sardar was, silent and quiet but when Mr. Pratt made a perverse reference to the struggle of the Ahmedabad labourers, Sardar asked for permission to offer an explanation. Making a reference to the words of Mr. Pratt about the 'Majoor Sabha' skillfully, he said: "In that meeting Pratt Saheb had said that Gandhi Saheb will give you correct advice. If you follow his advice, you will improve yourself and you will get justice. I am also telling you that you will get justice at the hands of the Commissioner Saheb, if you follow the advice of Mahatma Gandhi in this matter." Satyagraha means self-restrain and self-sacrifice. An incident occurred in Navagam proving this. The land of a Satyagrahi farmer was attached. The land produced onions and had to be dug out. If that was not done and if it rained, the crop would be wasted. It was, therefore, decided on the advice of Gandhiji to dig out the onions and they went to the field under the leadership of Mohanlal Pandya. The Government arrested them

and sentenced them on the charge of stealing onions. Gandhiji observed at the time : “The case is such that it could be won in appeal in a second. Still Vallabhbhai or I did not ask any question, because a Satyagrahi cannot make an appeal. The best course for him is to go to prison.”

His feelings towards his colleagues and followers, because of which, he was always dear to them, was expressed on June 27. On that day Pandiyaji who came to be known as “onion thief” was to be released. For his reception Gandhiji, Sardar and other leaders walked seven miles from Mahemdabad and took part in the meeting. A speciality and greatness of Sardar was that he used to keep an eye on the humblest of his colleagues and attendants, understood their difficulties and rendered or caused to be rendered all possible help.

As is usual with such struggles ultimately the demand of the people was accepted. There was rejoicing everywhere but a special outcome of this struggle for the country was that Sardar, because of Gandhiji’s tutelage for about three months, became quite adept in the art of Satyagraha. Gandhiji was also specially glad that during the Kheda struggle he came across ‘Sardar’. It also inspired so much confidence in Vallabhbhai about Gandhiji that at the end of the Kheda struggle, when Gandhiji called upon people to enroll in the British Army during the First World War, Vallabhbhai was the first to enroll his name.

On June 29, at the function to celebrate the end of this struggle, Gandhiji observed : “The skill of the leader lies in selecting his Executive Committee. The work can be organised if the followers abide by the ideals and rules laid down for the purpose. It is not as if I have made a great achievement but the important thing is that many persons are prepared to accept my advice. I also considered who can be the Deputy Leader and thought of Vallabhbhai. I must admit that I was worried when I first met Vallabhbhai and wondered what sort of a man this stiff-necked person was and whether he would be useful in work. But when I came in close contact with him I realised that Vallabhbhai was



Ancestral house at Karamsad (Gujarat)



Mother Ladbai



While at school



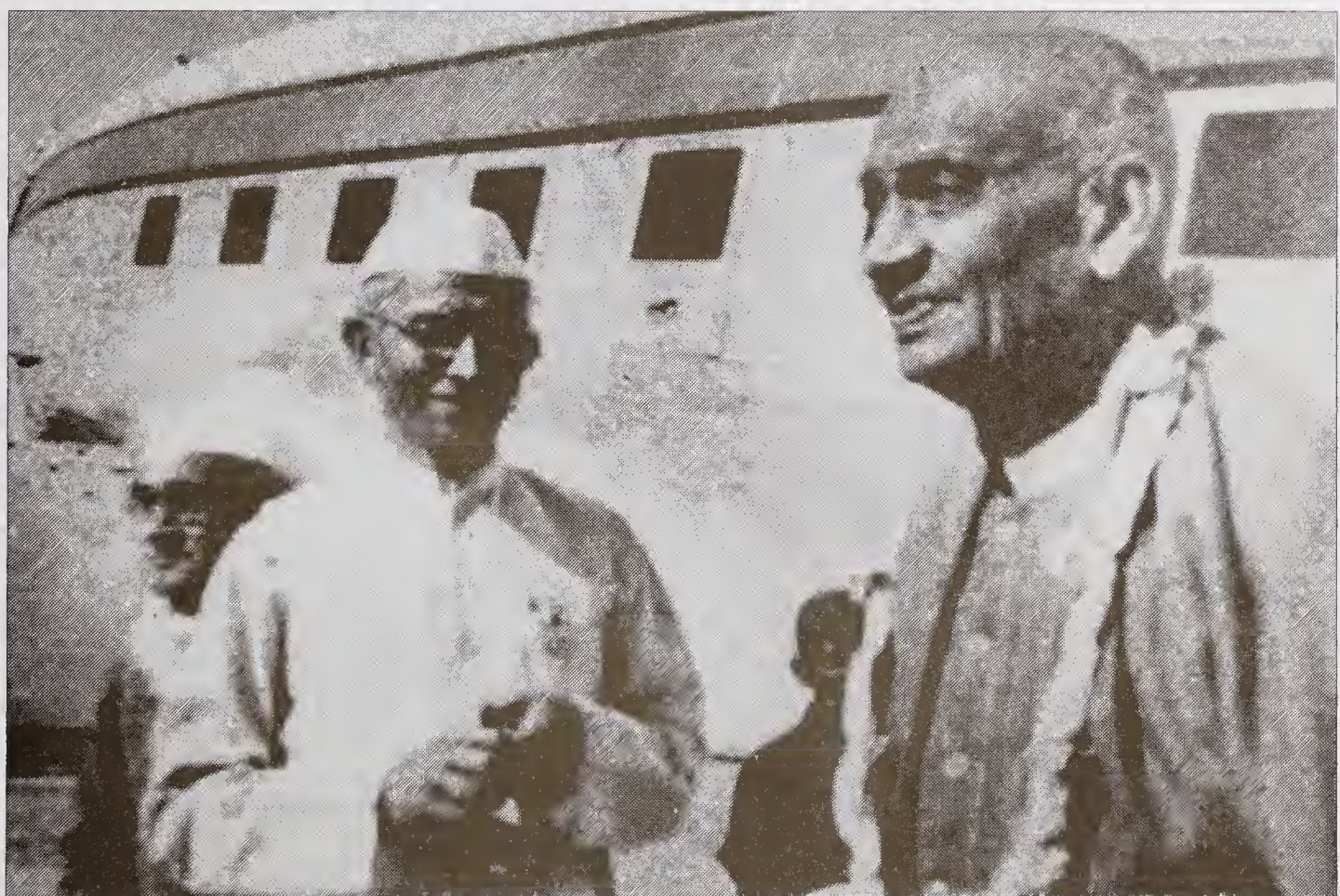
Leaving for London for higher studies, 1910



Mother Ladbai with five sons (L to R) Vitthalbhai, Somabhai,
Kashibhai (standing) Narsinbhai, Vallabhbai



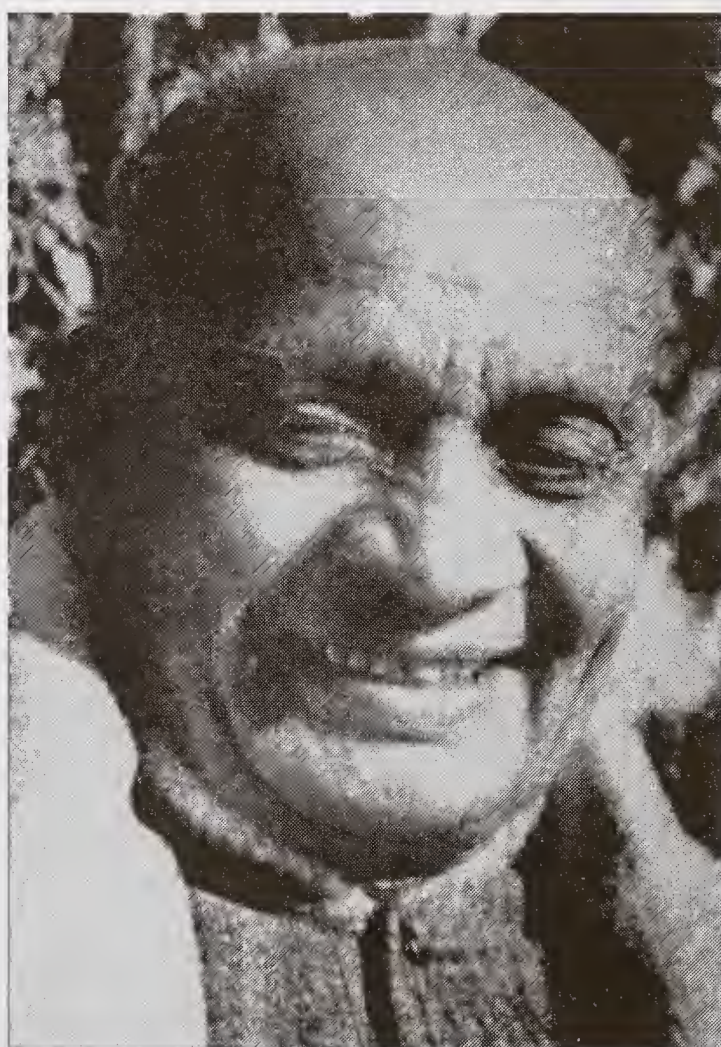
Farewell to Lord Mountbatten



A couple of months before his death
(with former Prime Minister Morarji Desai)



Last homage lying-in-state



In memory

quite necessary for me. Vallabhbhai felt that he was practising as a lawyer and also bearing a heavy responsibility in connection with the municipal work but that this work was much more responsible. I have my practice today but it may not last. My wealth also may be spent. Instead of letting my successors spend away my wealth, why should not I leave a much nobler legacy for them? He joined the struggle with such ideas in mind. If Vallabhbhai had not met me, what work had been achieved would not have been possible. So good was my experience about him.”

Vallabhbhai expressed at the function : “It is customary in India that deities and Mahatmas do not accept the offerings given to them but distribute the same among their followers. Similarly Mahatmaji has offered everything to me. As a matter of fact I have not done anything.” Thus Vallabhbhai learnt the lessons of leadership under the direction of Gandhiji during the Kheda struggle and Gandhiji also realised the metal of which Sardar was made. Thus between the two a lifetime association of love and service came to be forged.

A Lion's Cub

Sardar Patel after obtaining his Bar-at law returned to India in February 1913 and started practice at Ahmedabad. He was well known in Ahmedabad even before that and after coming to Ahmedabad from Bombay he stayed at the Cama Hotel and went straight to the Panchmahals to put in an appearance in a case. Thus from the very beginning Sardar had a lucrative practice. He was engaged in complicated criminal case. Ordinarily he used to appear on behalf of the defence. Sardar had a unique capability of finding out the main issues involved in the case, relegating unnecessary details, while presenting his case. Even in the cross-examination he used to ask questions to the point, so that in spite of the fact that the cross-examination was short, it resulted in the evidence of the witnesses cross-examined being demolished. Even the British Magistrates who were insolent used to give in to Sardar and acted according to the procedure. Shri Mahadev Desai and Shri Narhari Parikh had come to Ahmedabad as fresh advocates. They used to attend the court in interesting cases. By their daily observations, they used to nickname the advocates according to their special qualities. The government pleader Shri Manilal Bhagubhai was very pompous and hot-tempered. He used to pounce upon the opponent in such a manner that these two had nicknamed him a "tiger." Barrister Majmudar used to thunder in the court and, therefore, he was nicknamed "lion". After hearing Vallabhbhai for a few days Narharibhai told Mahadevbhai that barrister Vallabhbhai was also a lion. Mahadevbhai replied, "Yes, but he is still young. Therefore, we nickname him a young lion". In due course he became well known as a full-fledged lion in the entire country but just as a young lion jumps upon an elephant and tears apart its temple in the same way this young

lion proved more than a match to the doyens of the Bar and the Bench.

A British Magistrate was very arrogant. He did not hesitate in insulting even well-known advocates. Therefore, all were afraid of appearing before him. In a murder case, Sardar had to appear before this Magistrate. In order to frighten witnesses, he made them give evidence by looking into a mirror. In this particular case also he ordered this to be done. Immediately, Sardar said that this fact should be noted. The Magistrate, however, said that it was not necessary to do so. Sardar said that this mirror will be considered as a part of evidence and will have to be produced in the Sessions Court along with the case papers. The Magistrate was frightened. So far he had not come across any one who had challenged him in this manner. Still he did not yield, nor did Sardar. The dispute became very hot. The courtroom was packed to capacity. Everyone became anxious. Ultimately Sardar said that he did not want this case to be conducted in his court and started preparing an application for transferring the case to some other court. The result was that the magistrate cooled down and asked for the witnesses to be produced. Sardar said that he did not want to produce any witnesses but will give the names of the witnesses in a sealed packet, whom he would produce in the Sessions Court and gave a sealed packet to be opened only in the Sessions Court. The Magistrate was stunned. He opened the packet and found that the very first name of the witness was his own. The murdered woman was also cited as a witness. Other matters were also mentioned which scared the Magistrate very much. The Magistrate did not believe the evidence of the police witnesses, made comments against them and since on the basis of *prima facie* evidence the case would have to be committed to the Sessions. On the very first day in the Sessions Court, the case was dismissed.

A relative of Sardar was a Railway Police Inspector. His relations with his superior, the Superintendent of Railway Police were strained. The Superintendent was an influential British Officer. His brother was Home Secretary in the Bombay Government. In those days there used to be many cases of theft in

the Railways. Taking advantage of this, the Superintendent of Police, alleged that the Inspector had stolen fire-wood of the value of about one rupee, got him arrested and using his influence, got a special Magistrate appointed to conduct this case. The case was to be conducted in Kheda District and yet the Government Pleader from Ahmedabad was asked to appear in the case. The details of the case were collected by the Superintendent himself. He was trying to find out whether this Inspector was sentenced in the past. When Sardar came to know of this, he advised the accused to meet the Superintendent personally and admit that he was sentenced for nine months solitary confinement but that this was 30 years ago and was not, therefore, of importance now. The Superintendent noted all this in the charge-sheet and sent the case papers to the court. Unfortunately, when the case was called out in the court, Sardar was ill. Therefore, his elder brother Vitthalbhai conducted the case on his behalf. There was a heated quarrel between the government pleader and Vitthalbhai. As expected the Magistrate sentenced the accused to six months' imprisonment and made comments in the judgement against Vitthalbhai. Sardar appealed in this case to the Sessions Court of Ahmedabad and entrusted the case to a well-known barrister. The Sessions judge refused to release the accused on bail and therefore, Sardar requested for the hearing of the appeal within three days. When the appeal was being heard in spite of the fact that the case was weak, the government pleader was arguing loudly and was emphasizing the fact that the accused was a Police Officer. The argument of the defence barrister was that the status of the accused was not relevant to the case and that what was necessary was that the offence should be proved. Then the government pleader observed that the accused was sentenced to nine months' solitary confinement in the past and that this fact should be borne in mind. On hearing this, the defence barrister was shocked and became angry that Sardar had not disclosed this fact to him. The courtroom was full and everyone was conjecturing as to the decision in the case. Thereupon Sardar got up and requested for proof of the previous imprisonment. The Sessions Judge gave the relevant note. In the meantime the government pleader got angry and said

that since the past, where was the necessity of asking for proof thereof? Sardar examined the note and showing it to the Sessions Judge drew his attention to the fact that the age of the accused was thirty years and the note also said that he was sentenced 30 years ago. There was laughter in the court. The government pleader was ashamed and Sardar took the situation in his hand and emphasizing the impossibility of the statement laid bare the fabrication to implicate the Inspector, with a view to obtaining a sentence against him. Criticizing the Superintendent and also Government for incurring so much expenditure, at the instance of the Superintendent, with humourous and yet pointed arguments requested that the comments against Vitthalbhai be expunged and that the accused be acquitted. As a result, the accused was acquitted and the comments against Vitthalbhai expunged. The remarks against the Superintendent in the judgement was such that he had to resign.

The government officers considered the Kheda District as criminal. Therefore, the Sessions Court of Kheda District was conducted in Ahmedabad. In such cases, the benefit of the jury was available to Ahmedabad and other Districts but Kheda District was denied this benefit. In a murder case of Kheda District two brothers were committed to the Sessions, in spite of the fact that there was no *prima facie* evidence. The British Judge had refused the bail application on the ground that the people of Kheda District were known for tampering with evidence. Sardar was engaged as barrister on behalf of the accused and he again made a bail application.

During the hearing of the case, Sardar attacked the Sessions Judge observing that the refusal to allow the bail application was based only on a conjecture that the accused was from Kheda District and, therefore, will tamper with evidence. "I must observe with regret that in the proceedings in this court, in the case of no accused from Kheda District, the evidence is appreciated in a reasonable manner. The attitude adopted is that since the accused is from Kheda District irrespective of whether there is evidence or not he must be punished. In this case also, this court appears to

proceed on this assumption, otherwise in spite of the fact that there is hardly any *prima facie* evidence, why should the court refuse the bail application?" As the case was important the courtroom was full of barristers and advocates. The judge was stung by the direct attack and observed : "Mr. Patel, you are making this serious allegation against the court in excitement. I will adjourn the court now and will meet again after half an hour." The judge went into his chamber and the bail later was granted. Later on the accused were acquitted.

This lion-heartedness of the Sardar i.e. fearlessness, self-confidence, composure, self-respect and will-power were his natural qualities. When he was studying for the Law degree he used to stay at a friend in Bakrol. He got a boil in the armpit. In those days surgery was not in vogue. The village barber used to heat an iron rod and apply it to the abscess to remove the pus. The barber heated the rod but was not prepared to apply the rod for a long time because Sardar was young. On seeing this, Sardar himself took the rod and calmly applied the rod to all parts of the abscess and removed all the pus.

In May 1911 while he was taking bath in England, he felt giddy and fell down. After that he had very high fever and it was found that his leg was afflicted with guineaworms. He was operated in a Nursing Home but the surgeon was not fully conversant with such infection and the guineaworms were not taken out completely. He was operated upon for the second time. There was then titanous poisoning and the pain increased. The surgeon advised amputation of the leg but this advice was not acceptable and, therefore, they approached the Professor of his College Dr. P.T. Patel. He agreed to operate upon but pointed out the dangers of giving chloroform for anaesthesia. Sardar said that he did not want any chloroform. It is noteworthy that till the operation was over Sardar did not wince even once. The surgeon and his assistants were very much surprised and again and again expressed that they had not come across a patient with such forbearance and boldness. Since his childhood he displayed these qualities and, when he was studying at Nadiad he used to foot out the distance between Nadiad and

Karamsad rather than travel by train. Even in London he used to foot out 12 miles to the library. Daily he used to walk for 25 miles. He was resolute in achieving the goal he had decided upon. When he was studying at Nadiad a teacher named Mahanand contested the Municipal election. He was opposed by a well-known person from Desai family of Nadiad. He boasted that if this teacher defeated him he would remove his moustache. Sardar took up this challenge. With the help of the students, he carried on such propaganda that Mahanand was elected. As soon as the result was declared, he collected about 50 boys and along with a barber went to Desai and asked him to get ready to remove his moustache.

He did not yield to the high-handedness or unreasonableness of the teachers also. The two instances, one at Baroda about writing the sums and the other at Nadiad about business of books and stationery of a teacher are evidence of his revolt against injustice and unreasonable behaviour. He joined the Ahmedabad Municipality with a similar motive. The government carried out an amendment to the Municipal Act in 1914 and forced a covenanted civil officer as the Municipal Commissioner. Thus in spite of the fact that the Municipal administration was called self-government, whatever the Government desired would be done. A resolution was passed in the political conference of the Bombay Presidency in 1916 for the abolition of this procedure but Government was used to ignoring all such resolutions. One Mr. Shillidy I.C.S. known for his bureaucratic attitude and arrogance came to be appointed as the Commissioner of Ahmedabad Municipality. The Advocates of Ahmedabad were impressed by the shrewdness, cleverness and fearlessness of Sardar. Therefore, in order to control this Commissioner, they requested Sardar to contest the by-election of the Municipality from Dariapur Constituency. Thus Sardar entered the Municipality.

The first task he undertook was to put Mr. Shillidy straight. He went through the Municipal records to collect instances of high-handedness of this Commissioner. He found out that the Municipal Commissioner had taken steps to give away the Pushkar lake near the Kankaria lake owned by the Municipality to one

Fatehmohmad Munshi, against the resolution of the Municipal Board. He prepared a strong case and in the meeting of the general Body held on June 7, 1917, brought forward a resolution to the effect that Mr. Shillidy cannot continue as the Municipal Commissioner and, therefore, the President should be requested that when the Administration Report of the Municipality was sent to the government, a copy of this resolution should also be attached. Many counsellors who depended on the pleasure of the government were shocked at such a resolution against a covenanted civil servant. Many attempts were made to tone down the resolution but they could not succeed. Thereafter Sardar brought to light the unauthorised purchases made by this Commissioner and the government had to recall him. One Mr. Master succeeded Mr. Shillidy. He wanted to make as much money as possible and, therefore, requested for several special allowances. This request was sent by the President of the Municipality to Sardar in his capacity as the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee. At first Sardar did not take any action on this and when the British officer reminded him, in the presence of the President of the Municipality, Sardar told him : “You have been deputed by Government after deciding upon your pay and allowances. If these are not acceptable to you, you are at liberty to go back.” And so Mr. Master also went back. The Commissioner of Northern Division Mr. Pratt wanted to put British officers as Municipal Engineer and Health Officers. When the post of Municipal Engineer fell vacant, although Indians were available, through influence one Mr. Mekase, a Britisher was appointed to this post. Had this officer been efficient he would have been tolerated but he was quite inefficient. As a result there were complaints about shortage of water supply. The Gujarat Sabha convened a meeting of the citizens and passed a resolution about this and copies were sent to the President of the Municipality, the Collector of the District and the Divisional Commissioner. The Divisional Commissioner expressed a desire to meet the Secretaries of the Sabha and when they went to see him, pouring out his anger against Sardar, he said : “If you have any grievance you go to the Municipal Hall and until your demand is satisfied, do not allow the Municipal Committee to rest in

peace. You carry on agitation and if you do not get water, go to the houses of the members and set them on fire.” Sardar asked the Secretaries of the Sabha and got this information. Mr. Pratt, through his informants, obtained news about the plans of Sardar and prepared himself to prove the ability of Mr. Mekase. For that he called the Consulting Engineer of the Government of Bombay and arranged visits to the places which were experiencing difficulties in obtaining water supply. Sardar was invited in his capacity as the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee and Mr. Pratt was also present. The area known as Dhal ni Pole was at the highest level in the city. When the party met at that place, Sardar started to say that in his opinion the best solution to meet the situation was. . . Before Sardar could finish the sentence, Mr. Pratt in an angry tone said : “Mr. Patel, the best solution is that your Sanitary Committee cooperates with the Municipal Engineer.” Sardar was not the one to tolerate such curtness. In those days it was considered impossible to speak against the British Divisional Commissioner. Interrupting him this lion roared : “The best solution is to dismiss this inefficient engineer from service. You have forced him on the Municipality. What has this engineer asked my Sanitary Committee to do and we have not done? Please show us if there is any such instance. Why not ask him whether there is any such instance? Yet when the Secretaries of Gujarat Sabha met you, you had the audacity to advise them to set our houses on fire. Why should our houses be set on fire? At the root of all this trouble is this engineer. Why should not his bungalow be set on fire?” Mr. Pratt said : “Mr. Patel you are not in a mood to talk.” Sardar replied : “How can I be in a mood to talk?” The matter ended there. The party returned in their respective cars. The programme of paying visits in the city was dropped. In a few days the engineer tendered his resignation and went away.

In his capacity as the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, it came to his knowledge that several title-holders, officers and magistrates were not paying the water-tax to the Municipality. They believed that they cannot be asked to pay this tax. Notices were issued to all such persons and on one such person a warrant was also issued. As a result everyone paid up the past dues.

The covenanted civil servants and other highly placed officers residing in the camp area used to get water supply for 24 hours but did not pay tax even as much as the amount paid by the other citizens. Without fear of anybody, Sardar threatened to disconnect the water supply to the camp area and brought everyone to their senses.

An Apostle of Non-Cooperation

Mahatmaji gave a call for enrolment in the British army and Sardar enlisted himself. Many expressed opposition to this move of Mahatmaji and called Sardar a blind follower of Mahatmaji. In fact the intention was to give as a Satyagrahi, every reasonable opportunity of cooperation to the opposite party. The government wanted to make use of everyone. The talk about constitutional reforms or Home Rule was misleading. After the first World War was over and when the expectations of the people were increasing the government passed the Rowlatt Act, which came to be known as the Black Act. The freedom of speech was curbed and those national leaders who were considered undesirable by the government were arrested and kept under surveillance. At that time Gandhiji was very ill. He felt very much when he read about this. Sardar used to visit the Ashram daily to see Gandhiji and to find out about his health. Gandhiji told Sardar that something should be done about this. Sardar asked what could be done? Gandhiji replied that if few persons are prepared, then they should offer Satyagraha. Several other leading persons also felt grief at this development. As a result Sardar along with Sarojinidevi, Shankarlal Banker, Indulal Yajnik, Umar Sobani established a Satyagraha Sabha and gave a call for non-cooperation. April 6 was observed as a day of strikes and fasts, throughout the country. A large procession was organised in Ahmedabad, which converted into a meeting on the banks of Sabarmati. In that meeting, 'Hind Swaraj' and 'Sarvodaya' written by Gandhiji with a view to civil disobedience were distributed. Disturbances broke out at several places when Mahatmaji was arrested on the 9th. Ahmedabad was not an exception to this. Sardar used to move about in the city to calm down the people, help those injured to be removed to the

hospital and supply food-grains to their relatives. The Police Superintendent of Ahmedabad, Mr. Hilly was so much impressed by the attempts of Sardar to establish peace in the city during and after the disturbances, that after ten years, he advised the government that it would not be possible to establish peace in Bardoli without Vallabhbhai.

A collective fine was imposed, as a result of these disturbances and Sardar was not exempted from the fine. Since he had not taken part in the disturbances nor encouraged the same, out of self-respect, he informed the government in a polite manner his intention not to pay this fine. A notice was issued for attachment and a sofa-set from his drawing-room was attached and the fine was realised.

In the meantime the District Judge had requested the High Court to disqualify him from practising, Sardar and other advocates, who had signed a pledge to offer Satyagraha. The High Court issued notices and the case came up before the full Bench of the Bombay High Court on July 24, 1919. Sir Chimanlal Setalvad argued that in the pledge it has been clearly mentioned that one should abide by truth and not cause injury to anyone. How can such a person be considered blemished? The Judges of the High Court observed that in offering civil disobedience if a man has acted in a manner which does not involve any moral turpitude, then such a person cannot be deprived of his 'Sanad'* to practise in the courts or to disqualify him for any other purpose. As a result of this judgement, the advocates and barristers were free to join the civil disobedience movement. Not only that, it became clear that those who were sentenced for taking part in this movement were not disqualified from contesting by-elections to the Legislative Assembly, Local Boards or Municipalities.

So far as the Sardar was concerned, there was no concern of his taking up practice again. His entire time was devoted to public activities. Cases for removing railway tracks during the disturbances mentioned here which were brought before the special

courts were the last cases handled by him. He got most of the accused in these cases acquitted. There was, however, an interesting case. A farmer was accused of having removed the railway track near Nadiad station. His house was searched and some spanners were taken into custody from his residence. The accused had an engine pump for his well and, therefore, he used to keep such spanners in his house but the police considered these as spanners for using on railway tracks. During the hearing of the case, Sardar, the judge, and the government pleader visited the place of the crime. Sardar requested them to take all the spanners along with them while visiting the place. After the judge inspected the place, Sardar requested that they should try to remove the railway tracks with the spanners, which were taken into custody as evidence. When this was tried not a single spanner could fit the nuts of the railway track. The police officers were stunned and Sardar told the judge that in cases like these, such irregularities were committed and anyone could be arrested and a case registered against him.

The atrocities of Amritsar and Jallianwala Bagh caused widespread resentment in the country. When Gandhiji gave a call for non-cooperation movement, the poet laureate, Tagore returned his title. Gandhiji returned his medals. In the annual meeting of the Gujarat Political Association, Sardar moved a resolution for non-cooperation movement. Moving this resolution, he commented on the statement made by some moderates about the hazards of the movement. He said : “It is true that there are dangers, which country in the world has achieved independence easily? Is there less danger in keeping quiet? Has any one given up great experiment for the upliftment of people because of the fear of the dangers involved? If those who have established such a large empire had been afraid of dangers, would it have been in existence today!”

Another resolution was on non-cooperation in the educational sector. As a constructive measure, the establishment of Gujarat Vidyapeeth was resolved.

In the Congress session at Calcutta, non-cooperation movement was accepted in principle and in the Congress session

at Nagpur 'Swaraj' within a year became a popular slogan. Sardar told Gandhiji not to worry about the Tilak fund, Congress membership and spinning-wheels so far as Gujarat was concerned and he plunged into these activities wholeheartedly. With the help of enthusiastic colleagues, this volunteer of non-cooperation movement collected an amount of 15 lakhs of rupees, against the target of 10 lakhs for the Tilak fund. The target fixed for membership was almost achieved and so also the target fixed on the number of spinning-wheels but they could not be put to use.

On August 1, which was the first anniversary of Tilak, Gandhiji gave a slogan for making a bonfire of foreign clothes. This programme became effective in all the villages. The bonfire in Ahmedabad was as grand as that in Bombay. Sardar had consigned his barrister's robe, a dozen of suits, neckties, 250 collars and 10 pairs of shoes to this bonfire. As soon as the bonfire was lit people took out foreign clothes and hats and consigned the same to the bonfire. Alongside in Gujarat, under the leadership of Sardar, picketing was started at shops dealing in foreign clothes and liquor. In his speeches in order to relieve the shortage of cloth, Sardar emphasized on the need to use 'Khadi', to put on fewer clothes, to mend and use torn clothes and not to buy new clothes under any circumstances.

Sardar started putting on 'khaddar' clothes from the summer of 1921. He had to accompany Gandhiji to Godhra where a District Conference was organised. He, therefore, requested Narharibhai the earlier day to carry a couple of *banians* and *dhotis* along with his clothes while coming to Godhra. Next day at Godhra after bath he put on the 'khaddar' dress. It was the wish of his daughter Manibehn that she should herself prepare 'Khaddar' clothes for her father. After 1923 mostly and after 1927 entirely Sardar put on 'khaddar' clothes which were spun by Manibehn.

The atmosphere was electrified with the slogan 'Swaraj within a year' and demonstrations were organised on a very large scale. The government was also worried but there was apathy towards the constructive programme to uplift the people. How could Sardar miss this point? He also wanted to present a correct

picture to Gandhiji. Therefore, he accompanied Gandhiji on his tour of Kutch District. The younger daughter of Laxmidas Ashar, Anandi and Krishnadas were in this group. When the party reached Kutch in a steamer, Sardar deliberately introduced to the people who had organised the reception, Krishnadas as a Harijan and Anandi as the Harijan girl adopted by Gandhiji. An awkward situation was created thereby. Among the receptionists, a couple of persons advocated removal of untouchability but when the rest of the people came to know that there were 'harijans' in the party, they requested that the visits of the party to their villages may be dropped. Gandhiji insisted on continuing with the original programme. Consequently at some places they had to stay in caravan serai, at other places they could not get a cook and, therefore, they had to prepare their food themselves, or were served food from at a distance and at some others after meals, the houses and rooms were cleansed with water. There were disturbances at some meetings because of this but Sardar succeeded in placing before Gandhiji, a true picture of the position prevailing in Kutch.

In order to assess how far the non-cooperation movement would succeed, he made two Ahmedabad Municipal teachers to make applications that they would prefer to teach in the non-cooperation schools. He created such a situation that a resolution was passed by the Municipality to keep out the Ahmedabad Municipal schools from government control and its examinations and to introduce teaching in these schools on the basis of national programme. Such resolutions were also passed by the Nadiad and Surat Municipalities and thus Sardar started the non-cooperation movement in the Local Self Government institutions all over the country. Government used all its resources to break down and finish this movement. Overnight resolutions were passed, letters were dispatched, orders issued and new strategies and plans were tried. Arrangements were made to stop the pay of the teachers and teachers were also threatened that they would lose their pension and provident fund but the municipalities remained firm and made it clear that the matter of organisation and implementation of strategy would remain unchanged. Government superseded all the three Municipalities but still there was no change in the situation.

Sardar had become so popular and he had made his co-workers strong, that the plan was carried out bravely. The non-cooperation movement in the municipalities conducted by Sardar was very romantic and the struggle that was carried on from time to time was praiseworthy. The detailed history of this movement would require too long a space. Suffice it to say that in order to discourage Sardar and to ensure that no one stood by him, the government filed a suit in the District Court to recover an amount of Rs. 1,68,600 spent on the schools which were taken out of control of government personally from the 19 counsellors who had the resolution passed in the Municipality. The government argued that the expenditure incurred on schools in defiance of law should be considered as misuse of the Municipal funds and that the defendants should be held responsible for it. Diwan Bahadur Harilal Desai, with the help of Dadasaheb Mavlankar, put an appearance on behalf of the defendants. In a long judgement the judge observed that from whatever point of view one looked at this case, whether from the point of view of the language of law or from the point of view of the entire scheme of the Municipal Act or from the point of view of principle that certain acts could be considered beyond the powers or from the point of view of misuse of funds, one feels that the plaintiff, the government has adopted a wrong action and the suit cannot sustain itself in law. The suit is, therefore, dismissed. The judge also ordered that the cost of the suit should be paid by the plaintiff (government) to the defendants and should bear its own cost. The government moved the District Court but there also the appeal was dismissed with costs. Sardar was not the one to allow this opportunity to go by. He wrote in 'Navjivan' about this asking whether the cost incurred on this suit and that which would have to be paid to the defendants would be considered as proper use or misuse of funds and whether the large sum by way of fees that the government pleader would get for conducting this patently unjust case, would also be considered a proper use of funds? That the "honest" gang which makes such "proper" use of funds considers those who spend money on the education of their own children as misuse of funds is a heresy which could be found only in this government.

On April 22, 1923 Sardar wrote that in Surat and Nadiad the people had stopped paying taxes since a year. A number of water connections were disconnected in Surat and yet the people did not yield. Therefore, attachments of property were made through Revenue Officers to collect taxes. At the time of attachment, no witness was kept nor a Panchnama drawn up. Even receipts were not given for the goods taken. The Mamlatdar himself removed ornaments from the body of the person. The dacoits put on a veil at night out of fear and finish their work in haste but this work is carried on in broad daylight with indifference and in the name of law. The pity is that those who carry out attachments are our own people. The Mamlatdar is our own, those who carry away the goods attached are our own, those who have entered the Municipality in place of those who have resigned are our own and those whose goods are attached are also our own. Such is the appearance of slavery.

The movement in Nadiad and Surat lasted for a year. As in Ahmedabad the government also filed suits for the recovery of expenditure incurred on primary schools. In Nadiad the Judge accepted a claim for about Rs. 12,000 and in Surat for about Rs. 40,000. People collected the money and paid up the amount.

When this non-cooperation movement was gaining ground in Gujarat, Gandhiji was preparing for a nationwide non-cooperation movement. As a part of this national programme one Taluka was to be selected for the no-taxation campaign. Anand and Bardoli were the two competitors for this honour. Ultimately Bardoli was selected. Before launching the Bardoli struggle, Gandhiji gave a last opportunity to the Viceroy. All attempts for a settlement having failed, Gandhiji was prepared to launch the Bardoli Satyagraha. In the meantime violence broke out in Chauri Choura (Assam). Gandhiji was so touched by this violent incident, that he postponed this no-taxation movement and suspended the Satyagraha movement.

In fact, some people in the British Empire were scared of the work that was done through the power of Sardar in the country and particularly in Gujarat. The Governor of Bombay in an interview with a Britisher stated, “Had these people taken a step

further and refused to pay the taxes God knows where we would have been.”

The decision of Gandhiji to suspend the movement was not liked by many in the Congress. Vitthalbhai, Dasbabu, Motilal, Lala Lajpatrai were all upset. Only Sardar and Rajendrababu had accepted faithfully this decision of Gandhiji. Jawaharlal in his autobiography has observed that on the face of it, it appeared that the movement was in full force and the people were enthusiastic but in fact the situation was quite different. Gandhiji was able to realise the strength of the people on the basis of their faith in and their identification with him. He used to call it the voice of his conscience. Sardar also was aware of the limitations of the people fully well, because of his constant touch with them.

With the suspension of the movement, there was frustration among the people and government taking advantage of this opportunity, arrested Gandhiji and sentenced him to six years imprisonment. In the absence of Gandhiji, Sardar prepared the people through constructive work and became a worthy pupil of Gandhiji.

Work is Worship

Sardar had the ability to start a movement arranging its strategy and achieving success but he was not only a warrior, he also took pleasure in constructive work and could organise such work. He believed that constructive work was the way by which the courage of the people could be enhanced. Consequently after the imprisonment of Gandhiji and the suspension of Satyagraha many wanted to court arrest by defying the law. In the conference held in Bharuch District on April 15 and 16, 1922, under the leadership of Mahadevbhai, who observed in his address that in order to reduce the increasing gap between the Hindus and the Muslims, to overcome the apathy of people towards constructive work and give a fillip to such constructive work, the only means was pure sacrifice. The conference resolved to request Provincial Committee to start individual yet intensive non-violent non-cooperation movement.

Sardar was President of the Provincial Committee. At that time his influence was so great that he was known as the “Suba” of Gujarat and, therefore, only an indication of his consent was necessary. On his return from a tour of other provinces in his article ‘Desperate or Blind Effort’ he clarified the philosophy. He observed that this was not a desperate effort but a blind one. I am not prepared to allow anyone who is involved in constructive work to go to prison. Imprisonment is for persons like me who roam or wonder about or for those who do not have faith in constructive work. The non-violent non-cooperation would be useful only if our constructive work continues and its tempo increases as result of some of us going to prison. If anybody thinks that because he cannot do anything by remaining outside and, therefore, should go to prison, that thinking is erroneous.

The day after Gandhiji's arrest in a statement he observed that there was a very great responsibility placed on Gujarat. The period of trial for Gujarat has begun. Gandhiji had very clearly showed what is our duty at this stage. The real way in which we can show our feelings towards him is not to shout slogans hailing him or to run about for having his 'Darshan' but to get ourselves involved completely in the four-point programme of constructive work indicated by him.

What would the colleagues of Gandhiji do in his absence was the question uppermost in the mind of many. Sardar in his article called 'The Test of Faith' observed that just as a mason cannot claim to have the ability of an engineer, who prepares a plan and yet does not find any difficulty in completing the building according to the plan, in the same way if the colleagues of Gandhiji have understood properly the plan prepared by Gandhiji for the attainment of 'Swaraj' they will not find it difficult to carry on the work according to that plan.

Sardar wished that in the absence of Gandhiji, Gujarat should stick to the programme given by him, persons doing constructive work should continue with such work with full force and when the time comes carry on the civil disobedience movement.

On the other hand, the wish of many leaders of the country to enter the Legislative Assembly according to the new amendment was held in check because of Gandhiji's plan of non-cooperation. This wish became active again with the arrest of Gandhiji.

The viewpoint of Gujarat was echoed in the Sixth Gujarat Political Conference held at Anand. It was observed that some people thought we will achieve success by entering the Legislative Assembly but were we not in the Assembly before this? Is it within your power to pass resolutions after entering the Assembly? Some others talk of civil disobedience but if we are ready for this, would we have witnessed the marriage processions in Ahmedabad in which foreign clothes were freely used? In fact the photographs of such marriage processions are being sent to England in order to show that there is a wide gap in what Gandhiji says and what his colleagues practice.

In the meantime, the programme of national education was undertaken by Gujarat enthusiastically. There were 250 students in the Gujarat Vidyapeeth. There were in all 37,000 students in the national schools in Gujarat. The Library of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth contained 75,000 books, yet the Vidyapeeth did not have its own building. Sardar appealed to Gujarat that as a small test of its faith, Gujarat should donate Rs. 10 lakhs for the building of Vidyapeeth. As a test of devotion, within the stipulated time i.e., the October 2, the birthday of Gandhiji, Gujarat had collected Rs. 10 lakhs. Then Sardar undertook another programme. He knew the art of mobilising the people. This work was picketing the cloth shops which dealt in foreign clothes. He appealed for volunteers for this work. The precondition was that the volunteer should prevail upon his or her family members to give up wearing foreign clothes. Sardar appealed to the youth of Gujarat and Saurashtra with genuine national spirit, to resolve to undertake national service till the release of Gandhiji. If the name of Gujarat was to be upheld, indolence should be given up; otherwise with the passage of time the saying will gain ground that Gujarat did not acknowledge Gandhiji, who was acknowledged by the whole world.

He appealed to the foreign cloth merchants that till Gandhiji was in prison, they should show the courage of stopping the sale of foreign clothes. 'If you give a lead, it is possible that the entire country will follow you and Mahatmaji will be released soon from the prison.'

Picketing at the shops dealing with foreign clothes started from December. At that time, procession was taken out under the leadership of Sardar and there was sale of Khadi also. On this occasion many persons criticized the merchants but Sardar told them that it was not proper or reasonable to criticise the merchants alone. In fact, if we convince the people about not using foreign cloth, then the merchants will not import even a yard of such cloth.

The advice of Gandhiji was accepted in slogans but not in action. Sardar was quite aware of this. When the Kathiawad political Conference was held at Vadhwan, separate seating

arrangements were made for Harijans. In order to ensure that the Harijans sat in the separate space allotted to them and not in the other area, a volunteer was asked to look after the arrangement. Sardar saw that the Harijans were taking their seats in the conference with reserve. Sardar got up and took his seat in the space allotted to the Harijans. The Darbar Saheb and Bhaktilaxmi also sat in this space along with Sardar and Sardar delivered his speech from this place. He did not at all make any reference to this arrangement. He believed that practice was the best precept. Thus he appreciated the work done by the people, showed sympathy towards their weaknesses and tried to turn them towards constructive work.

In the meantime a bitter controversy arose on the question of entry into the Legislative Assembly. Deshbandhu, Motilal, Vitthalbhai and others strongly advocated entering the Legislative Assembly but Rajaji, Rajendra Prasad and Sardar insisted on concentrating attention on constructive work. In the successive meetings of the Central Committee, in the press and public meetings, a controversy raged between those in favour of change and those against it, which resulted at times in acute, bitter and personal attacks. After the meeting of the Central Committee at Bombay, Dasbabu on reaching Madras, criticised Gandhiji that though Lord Reading was agreeable for a compromise, Gandhiji made a mess of the situation and now wanted us to work on the spinning wheel. Sardar could not tolerate this and in his own style exposed all these persons. Vitthalbhai could not remain quiet. He accused that the 'Suba' of Gujarat (Sardar) was not abiding by the resolution of the Central Committee passed at Bombay, as a result of which the prestige of Congress was being damaged. Sardar in spite of the fact that Vitthalbhai was his elder brother and he had considerable love and affection towards him and in fact was maintaining him for years together, gave him a fitting reply. In spite of the acute differences of opinion in political matters between the two brothers, which resulted in heated quarrels, their personal relationship as brothers was not affected. Vitthalbhai when visiting Ahmedabad used to stay with Sardar and Sardar used to give Vitthalbhai respect due to an elder brother. There was no direct

discussion between the two brothers in private. Such exchanges used to be made through a third party. Vitthalbhai used to describe Sardar as “your Suba” or “the Suba of Gujarat”, where as Sardar used to describe Vitthalbhai as ‘Honourable Patel’ or “Patel Saheb”. During this controversy Vitthalbhai had once come to Ahmedabad, some friends who had come to meet Vitthalbhai were sitting in the drawing room of Vallabhbhai. When Vallabhbhai went to the toilet, Vitthalbhai put on the latch from outside. Sardar used to take a good deal of time in the toilet. When he tried to open the door, Vitthalbhai said “This is your ‘Suba’. He cannot even open the door of the toilet and come out and he wants to achieve ‘Swaraj’ for the country. He does not listen to us and quarrels with us.” After half an hour, Vitthalbhai opened the latch but Sardar went on with his work, as if nothing had happened.

In the meantime, Lala Lajpatrai and Maulana Mohamad Ali were released from prison. The final decision of the Working Committee of the Congress depended on the viewpoints of these two persons. For this purpose, a special meeting of the Congress Working Committee was called at Delhi. Both supported entry into the Legislative Assembly. Rajaji could not attend this meeting because of illness. He sent telegrams to Sardar and Rajendrababu that they should not oppose the viewpoint of the majority. Sardar expressed his views in heartfelt words. But, a resolution was passed in the Working Committee to the effect that those Congressmen who have no religious or other objections should be allowed to contest elections to the Legislative Assembly and to vote at such elections and that the Congress withdraws its movement against entry into the Legislative Assembly. The measure of practical value in the viewpoint of Sardar was discernible in the fact that in the elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1924 wellknown leaders contested elections and in the Central Assembly at Delhi the ‘Swaraj’ party was formed under the leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru but by 1929 i.e., in about five years’ time, the confidence of Pandit Motilal Nehru in the Legislative Assemblies was shattered completely. He felt that all Congressmen should tender their resignations from the Legislative Assemblies. The question that vexed their mind was what to do after that. For those who were

involved in constructive work there was a very vast field open to them. Consequently, the leadership of Congress was again placed in the hands of Gandhiji and in December 1929 in the Congress Session at Lahore, a resolution about complete independence was passed and in order to achieve this objective the Congress was directed to carry on the Civil Disobedience Movement, in the manner suggested by Gandhiji.

Sardar had confidence that the people could be organised through constructive work and limited Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience or no taxation campaign. Opportunities came from a couple of directions to demonstrate this. He utilised these opportunities in organising people, training them, creating confidence in the collective Civil Disobedience Movement and to instil in the hearts of people the necessity to depend on their own strength.

The first opportunity came at the time of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha. In March 1923, as delegates to the Congress Working Committee, Rajaji and others went to Jabalpur. The Municipality resolved as in the previous year to felicitate them and to hoist the national flag on the Municipal buildings. In the earlier year the Municipality had resolved to hoist on its buildings the national flag and not the Union Jack. There were questions in the parliament about this. The District Magistrate at this time as a measure of precaution, cancelled the resolution of the Municipality and ordered them not to call the meeting or to hoist the National Flag. On March 21, 1923 i.e., on the day of the anniversary of imprisonment of Gandhiji, Pandit Sundarlalji took out a procession along with the National Flag. Panditji was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. A big procession was taken out in Nagpur on April 13, which was stopped at the Civil Lines. The National Flag was snatched away and with the pole of the flag, the volunteers were beaten and some were dragged and thrown into the gutters. Thus started the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha. The question arose about the right to move about with the National Flag. Daily, a party of 10 volunteers used to offer Flag Satyagraha under the leadership of Jamnalalji. The movement which started from May 1, continued

upto the August 10. On the arrest of Jamnalalji, the Congress Working Committee decided to entrust the leadership of this movement to Sardar.

Sardar appealed for volunteers from all over the country and the Gujarat Provincial Committee started sending parties immediately. The leaders with the party reached Nagpur one after another, “Chhote Sardar” Dr. Chandulal Desai from Bharuch and Harijan worker Parikshitlal Majmudar from Ahmedabad started with their parties. As soon as Ravishankar Maharaj and Gokaldas Talati were in prison, Dr. Ghia from Surat, Kasturba and others came along. Similarly volunteers started coming from Andhra, Bihar, Sindh, Punjab, Bengal, Karnatak, etc. For Sardar, the situation was a little difficult because Swarajists like Dasbabu and others were opposed to this. They were powerful in Nagpur. After the arrest of Jamnalalji and Tikekar, Sardar had to fight on two fronts, one was the local opposition and another was collection of funds and volunteers. He appealed for funds and people from Rajasthan and Gujarat contributed liberally. After collection of funds, he planned the movement in a proper manner and gave a programme to different Provinces to send volunteers and concentrated his attention on work being done according to the plan.

Government committed such atrocities on the people in prisons hoping that weak persons would ask for pardon and go away. The doctor and other jail officers tried to force them to ask for pardon. They were forced to grind corn, much beyond they could, say 30, 40 or 50 pounds of corn. The chapaties were half baked and contained grit. The food served was not at all fit for human consumption. For all kinds of illness, only one type of mixture was given and sanitary arrangements were absolutely inadequate. In spite of this, in all 1748 persons suffered the imprisonment.

The session of the Nagpur Legislative Assembly began in the meantime, Vitthalbhai also reached Nagpur. Negotiations started and an agreement was reached that after the period of the ban was over on August 17, it would not be extended and it was

decided to release the prisoners. On August 18, Sardar took out a procession along with the National Flag, after informing the government. This procession was allowed to pass without any obstacle and thus the Flag Satyagraha came to a successful conclusion.

The successful conclusion of this Satyagraha was not liked by some covenanted officers as also by some national leaders. Motilalji levelled personal accusation against Sardar. 'Kesari' and 'Maratha' also criticised strongly. Everyone tried to put spokes in the fulfilment of the conditions. Attempts were made to denigrate Sardar but with a large hearted Sardar bore this patiently and compelled government to fulfil the conditions. Government officers were also fed up. The Commissioner also wanted to create trouble but he was concerned in such a way that he had no alternative but to act according to the agreement.

Many Congress workers realised for the first time the true principles of Satyagraha. That there was a place of pride for negotiations in a Satyagraha was realised by them. The measure of victory cannot be gauged by the extent to which the other party has been defeated but on how far truth has been advanced, how far the hearts of the volunteers been cleansed, and how far their will-power and self-confidence have been increased. For Sardar the best of the bad bargain was to tell his colleagues and volunteers from Gujarat that in spite of the bitter experiences in the prison, their enthusiasm had not dwindled even a bit but on the contrary had increased. Therefore, they should soon have an opportunity to undertake such work, for which they may have to suffer imprisonment or undergo other hardships for the sake of 'Swaraj'. By the grace of God, one such opportunity presented itself immediately and Sardar adopted a new method of training people.

The incidence of murder, robbery and other crimes had increased very much in Borsad Taluka. The menace of dacoits had also increased. The police report said that people were giving shelter to the dacoits, as a result of which government posted additional police force in the Taluka and in order to realise the extra expenditure incurred thereon levied a fine of Rs. 2,40,074/-

by a resolution on September 25, 1923. This resulted in a fine of Rs. 2 and 7 annas on each individual, including handicapped, orphans, and women. Naturally there was a feeling of anger among the people against this. As soon as Sardar, after finishing the work in Nagpur and attending the Congress session in Delhi, returned to Ahmedabad, the leaders of Borsad met him.

Sardar convened a meeting of the Provincial Committee and for making personal inquiries into the case, appointed a subcommittee consisting of “onion thief” Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishanker Maharaj. They moved about from village to village and inquired into the matter. Government made inquiries through its own informants. It did not take time for Sardar to find out the emptiness of government claim and when he realised that the case was strong, he convened the Taluka conference at Borsad on December 2, 1923. The subcommittee of Maharaj and Pandya had prepared a comprehensive report giving details about who the dacoits were, why they were indulging in dacoity, what types of crimes they were committing, why the police failed in giving protection to the people, why government blamed the people, how strong was the opposition of people against the collective fine, how many persons were ready to pay the fine and how many were not, whether they were prepared to carry on a struggle or not, etc. The report also contained information about the atrocities committed by the police. In the end, the report stated : “We had moved in many villages of the Taluka personally and after detailed inquiries are convinced that a very large number of people are completely innocent. The dacoits were committing crimes during night, while the police indulged in daylight robbery and innocent people were blamed. Government is of the view that the people give protection and shelter to the dacoits and provide them with food also. The citizens are of the view that police are in league with the dacoits and they provide arms and ammunition to them and recover a part of the booty from the dacoits.” In the meeting, Sardar gave, on the basis of the inside information obtained by him a detailed chronological history of the dacoit Babar Deva and his gang, how many and what type of reports the collector made, the type of report the reporter of Times of India was prevailed

upon to make. In addition, he had obtained a copy of the confidential circular issued by the Superintendent of Police to all sub-Inspectors and Jamadars about Ali. In this circular, instructions were given not to take notice of the dacoities committed by dacoit Ali, because he had promised to get Babar Deva arrested. On the basis of this official information, Sardar challenged government and accused it of giving protection to the dacoits and of implicating innocent people. After this conference, on December 1, Sardar had convened a meeting of the Provincial Committee in Borsad. Before calling the meeting, he cross-questioned Ravishanker Maharaj and Mohanlal Pandya, who had prepared the report. A speciality of Sardar was that he used to test severely his own colleagues. During this cross-questioning, he confused these two persons to such an extent that at one stage Ravishanker Maharaj felt that instead of appreciating the great troubles they had taken to prepare such a good report, this man was looking upon them with distrust. At that time, Ravishanker Maharaj had not come into close contact with Sardar and therefore, felt that it would not be possible for him to work with such a strict person but from the speech which Sardar delivered at the meeting of the Provincial Committee and the way in which he praised the report, Ravishanker Maharaj realised that their cross-questioning was only for the purpose of making sure about the details and to find out that they did not indulge only in vague talk. After this incidence, Maharaj became a devotee and colleague of Sardar and even after the demise of Sardar carried on the work of relief and upliftment of the downtrodden in the best possible manner. It was resolved in the meeting of the Provincial Committee that it was the duty of the Government to give protection to the citizens, Government made false accusations against the citizens. The collective fine imposed is, therefore, absolutely unjustified and oppressive. Therefore, the Committee advised the citizens to fight against this injustice, not to pay the fine and to bear patiently the difficulties they may have to experience as a result thereof.

Explaining the significance of this struggle, he said : “If one thinks that there will be a saving of 2½ rupees by not paying this fine, then there is no point in carrying on this struggle. We are not

colleagues of thieves and dacoits. We should carry on the struggle only if we feel that even the sovereign government has no right to level such accusations against us and that it does not matter if the government takes away goods worth ten rupees for realisation of this fine. It is better that the dacoits loot us rather than pay up the fine of 2½ rupees and accept thereby that we are in league with the dacoits. We are honest and respectable citizens and not colleagues of dacoits and, therefore, we are not going to pay the fine. Yet, if you want to collect the fine, as the dacoits loot us, you may likewise do so. You should carry on this struggle only with this clear understanding. Giving the methods of the struggle, he added that this struggle will be on the lines of the struggle carried on by Mahatmaji. There is no place for use of weapons in this struggle but only preparedness to suffer punishment at the hands of the government. This is a crusade and there is greatness in suffering for such a cause”.

Before launching the struggle he appealed for volunteers and established camps of trusted volunteers in different villages. Ravishanker Maharaj used to move about daily in the 18 border villages. In the other villages Pandyaji used to move about on horseback. The Borsad front was looked after by Darbar Saheb and his colleagues.

In different villages, the local councillors passed resolutions not to render assistance in the auction, not to bid at the auction and not to pay the fine. In order to keep up the morale of the people for this struggle and to ensure unity and enthusiasm, pamphlets were issued from Borsad, in which, in addition to the information about this struggle, instructions and advice about the struggle were given.

Government started confiscating the property and adopted oppressive measures. The citizens began opposing the same. The ‘Ravanaia’ community refused to carry the goods confiscated and their leaders refused to help in this matter. A drum was installed on a tree-top at the entrance of the village and as soon as the government persons approached the village for attachment purpose, the drum was beaten and the persons used to lock up their houses.

In a place like Borsad, for the whole day there would be dead silence. At night with the help of lamps, the bazar was held. Water used to be fetched from wells at night. In order to avoid attachment of utensils, earthen pots were used for fetching water and cooking purposes. Several methods were adopted for non-violent opposition. Annoyed by this, the government of Bombay issued a memo presenting its case. In that mention was made about the so-called Satyagrahi (Sardar) having obtained confidential government documents and accusations were made that people were not giving help to the police but giving protection and assistance to the dacoits. To this was attached a report of the Superintendent of Police containing 77 paragraphs. On December 23, Sardar gave a telling reply to this and exposed the government memorandum and challenged its veracity.

After sending this reply, Sardar left for Kakinada Congress Session. On the way, addressing a public meeting at Bombay, he said : “I have obtained confidential documents of government and from that laid bare its ill-intentions. If this is considered an offence according to law then it is open to government to proceed against me. I believe I will be able to meet the situation. But what is the reply of government to my accusation that it has taken the help of one dacoit in order to arrest another, by providing him weapons and ammunition and allowed him to commit murders and robberies? Who will prosecute government for committing this fraud on the public? Government itself is in league with the dacoits and yet they come forward to collect fine from innocent citizens, on the allegation that they are in league with the dacoits.”

This speech was published in almost all the newspapers of Bombay under big captions. Sir Leslie Wilson took over as the Governor of Bombay, after the Borsad struggle. He was shocked at this accusation against government and deputed the Home Member to make personal inquiries. He had two alternatives before him. If the inquiry revealed that there was substance in the accusation, then the fine should be withdrawn, otherwise proceed against Sardar. Accordingly the Home Member visited Borsad on January 4, 1924. He first met officers and understood the point of

view of government. Thereafter he arranged to meet about 150 leaders of villages. These leaders nominated Shri Rambhai Patel, an advocate from Borsad, to represent them. In fact there was a crowd of about 3000 before the bungalow of the Home Member. All sat quietly and the discussions started. At the outset, the Home Member spoke of the bonafides of government and requested people to cooperate with government. The people narrated in the presence of officers, the instances of harassment disclosing the names of officers involved. Some officers tried to defend themselves but the people exposed them more. They cited the Deputy Collector Shri Gandhi in connection with the misdeeds of a sub-Inspector of police one Shri Maganlal. Shri Gandhi stood up to confirm this but the Home Member prevented him from doing so. In the meantime the district Superintendent of Police started reading a list of dacoits whom the Police had brought to book. On hearing these names, those present at the meeting started smiling and the Home Member realised the position. He adjourned the meeting stating that he would make his report to government.

A memorandum was issued by the government on January 8, 1924 withdrawing the collective fine and directing the expenditure on the additional police to be met from the general funds. Thus the movement came to an end in five weeks' time and collective fine, which was an insult to the citizens was withdrawn. Sardar wound up the struggle and appealed to the citizens to protect themselves and banish the dacoits. This was reported upon by a cooperative newspaper like "Tribune", which was a tribute to Sardar. It reported that 'the non-cooperationists have not only withdrawn the struggle but their leaders have complimented government and assured that they will show that politeness of government is not misused. Who will, therefore, say that the non-cooperationists are recalcitrant and so obstinate that they could not come to a settlement?'

It is but natural that the workers would be very enthusiastic as a result of such a swift and complete victory. Sardar did not approve of a pamphlet prepared in this connection by Darbar Saheb and Pandyaji. He said : "A true Satyagrahi is one who on achieving victory does not allow the opposite party to feel the pangs of defeat.

Only then they can be said to have understood the true meaning of Satyagraha. It will be to our credit if at this stage we do not utter a word against the government officers. In the meeting to be held tomorrow only musical programmes should be organised”.

In the meeting organised to celebrate the victory, he told the people that the struggle was over and asked them to wind it up, and to work with utmost goodwill. “Do not harass those who, through weakness or fear of government, had paid up the fine and when you celebrate the victory, you invite the government officers who had come for attachment as also the police. Behave with Talati, Mukhi and Ravana in a friendly way. In order to ensure that the thieves and robbers do not stay among us, a religious and pure atmosphere should be created in the villages. If anybody knows Babar Deva or comes across him then tell him that your dacoity is not a real dacoity.”

As a result of this struggle, Darbar Saheb, Pandyaji, Ravishanker Maharaj and other 30 workers decided to camp in Borsad Taluka, in order to organise the citizens. Maharaj and Pandyaji made strenuous efforts to wean away the Baraiya and Patanwadia communities from indulging in theft and robbery and were successful in their attempts.

A happy coincidence was that when the victory of the Borsad struggle was celebrated on January 12, Gandhiji was operated upon in Sassoon Hospital and on February 5, he was released unconditionally. When Sardar went to Poona to meet Gandhiji, Gandhiji expressed his happiness and praised Sardar by welcoming him as the king of Borsad. When Gandhiji started writing in ‘Navjivan’ in the very first edition, he wrote about the work done in Gujarat by Sardar and to the effect that the history of the last two years of Gujarat brings credit to the people of Gujarat. Whatever brings credit to Gujarat brings credit to the country also. The ability of Vallabhbhai is visible in every aspect of this. His colleagues are also like him. The Borsad Satyagraha is a shining example of constructive work.

Immediately after the Borsad Satyagraha, another example of a similar Satyagraha on a smaller scale was witnessed. There

was a large scale theft of articles from the goods trains running between Nadiad and Baroda during that period. Persons used to get on to the open wagons and throw the bags and bundles, which were collected by their accomplices. Persons from communities like Patanwadia, Baraiya used to get on the wagons and throw the bags and bundles and the persons who were considered advanced used to receive such goods and dispose them of. The police were in the pay of such persons and thus it was a cooperative business. As persons benefited out of this, the incidents of theft increased and it became a craze with them. Sugar which was thus stolen was sold at one rupee a maund. As a result, people liked it and nobody gave information about the persons involved in this. The increase in the Railway Police by the Railway Authorities did not have any effect. Government, therefore, posted punitive Police in the villages adjoining the railway track and imposed fine on such villages. The culprits bribed such police also and continued with their activities. Consequently, there was discontent among the innocent persons who had to pay the fine. The reputation of such villages was also so much spoiled that young boys from such villages found it difficult to get suitable match for them from other villages. Ultimately these people appealed to the Provincial Committee. Sardar said that he was prepared to intervene provided an undertaking was given by the village leaders that such offences would not be committed hereafter. If persons are not available to receive the stolen property, automatically it will result in a setback to those who are indulging in such activities.

Mohanlal Pandya went round the villages on behalf of the Provincial Committee and explained the position to the people. People were ready but those who were getting benefit out of these activities were not prepared to give up. These people did not allow unity to be achieved. While this went on, government started attachment for recovering the stolen property and the people were put to a lot of difficulties. The people were confused and a meeting of the villages on which fine was imposed was held at Anand. Sardar explained to them that self-help is the best help and that, therefore, they should take responsibility upon themselves and to expose the bad elements in the village. As a result of this they

resolved to make strict arrangements and the village leaders accepted the responsibility to see that the stolen goods did not find a way into their villages.

As soon as these arrangements were made, Sardar wrote a letter to the Commissioner of the Northern Division giving a brief history of the case and stating : “My volunteers have made arrangements in different villages and I am now sure that such thefts will not occur hereafter.” Therefore, he requested for the punitive Police being withdrawn and for the return of the goods taken in attachment. “A recent experience has been that while the Police could not do anything in Borsad, with the efforts of our volunteers the menace of the dacoits had been removed. In this case also, if confidence is placed in the people and workers, I assure you that the results would be good. If, however, the fine is not withdrawn, then I will be constrained to advise these villages to carry on a Satyagraha and not to pay this fine.”

Shri Abbas Taiyabji went to Bharuch to deliver this letter to the Commissioner, who was camping there. The Commissioner advised Shri Abbas to delete the last sentence but Abbas Saheb expressed his inability to do so and requested him to keep trust in the rest of the matter.

The Commissioner realised the situation and within a short time, orders were issued withdrawing the fine and for return of the goods taken in attachment. Thus a great problem was solved automatically, by the confidence that was created by Sardar. It was a speciality of Sardar to bring to a successful conclusion the work taken in hand.

Constructive Work

People who strive for independence have to cultivate the habit of doing their work by themselves with proper understanding. With the experience in the Municipality, Sardar realised that since Local Self-Government is a step towards National Self-Government, and the work of Municipal administration was very important and that it was necessary that this administration should be pure and just, for the benefit and welfare of the middle classes, without any sort of influence and should be conducted efficiently. Through this work, it would be possible to cultivate the art of gaining the confidence of the people and the ability to carry out fearlessly welfare activities. In the beginning of 1924 the term of the Committee of Management of the Ahmedabad Municipality was over and elections were due. Sardar established his own party and contested these elections. Out of 48 seats, his party captured 35 and Sardar accepted responsibility as its President.

How difficult the work of making the city neat and clean and conducive to the welfare of the people through the Municipality is discernible from the description once given by Sardar at that time. "Our cities are neither cities nor villages. In spite of residing in cities, half the people live a village life. Half the residences do not have latrines. There is no place to dump garbage. They keep cattle although living in small lanes and thickly populated locality. Many cowherds keep flocks of cows in the heart of the city. Cattle move about in the streets. Generally people are very negligent in observing rules of hygiene, and cleanliness and do not understand their duties towards their neighbours. They consider nothing wrong in dumping their garbage at the doors of their neighbours. They do not hesitate throwing garbage or water from their windows. Foreigners do not find any sign of self-government, when they visit our Local Self-

Government Institutions or our cities. People commit nuisance at any place. The conditions in villages are none better than those in the cities. On entering any village one finds heaps of garbage. The roundabout of the village tank is used as a latrine. There is mud and pool of stagnant water round the village well. In such a situation, I consider it a sin to keep quiet and look up to the government.”

In fact even today there is no change in the mental attitude of people towards these conditions. One can see from this the ability of Sardar to reach to the heart of the matter and to make a deep study of the problems.

The efforts of the government to force the Municipality to purchase an engine at a cost of Rs. 3 lakhs without the consent of the Municipality was foiled by him. He settled the question of water supply to the camp area by facing the camp authorities boldly and thereafter he undertook schemes to provide drainage in the city, and in order to cope up with the population of the city and its transport problems, extension of the city limits and construction of new roads. In the early morning he used to visit along with the Municipal Engineer, sites where the work of laying the drainage pipes, waterworks or other engineering works were in progress and return home at twelve in the noon. At 3 O'clock in the afternoon, he used to go to the Municipal office and dispose of letters and files and hold discussions with the officers and gave them suggestions and directions. The most important organ of the Municipal administration is the Municipal Engineer and his department. Sardar used to keep this department quite alert and used to extend it all possible help and support. He treated his subordinates as his equals and, therefore, every one was willing and enthusiastic to do his work. He did not allow any influence but kept in mind the interests of the Municipality and proceeded boldly with the plans which he considered proper. He gave all his time to the institution and, worked with interest and therefore, the staff also did likewise. He appreciated the hardships, difficulties and limitations of his colleagues and was thus able to create a band of efficient and faithful officers around him.

The area within the wall and city was 1200 acres, out of which drainage facilities were provided in an area of 425 acres. During his career as president of the Municipality for four years, he completed the work of laying drainage lines throughout the city. Similarly, he made arrangements for the development of the sewage farm. He took up work of constructing new borewells in the river bank, installing new engine in the waterworks, widening the water pipes for supply of water to the city. For this he raised a loan of Rs. 45½ lakhs. In order to ensure that no defects could be found later, he used to invite the Sanitary Engineer of the Bombay Government from time to time and showed him all the work and arranged for discussions of the Municipal members with him and thus created an atmosphere of confidence.

On the one hand in order to meet with the problem of thickly populated area, he took up the Kankaria Town Planning Scheme as also Kankaria Development Plan and on the other hand the work of constructing the Relief Road and of demolition of the wall around the city. There was a stiff opposition from vested interests to the last two schemes but since it was not possible to solve the problem without these schemes, inspite of the opposition and without hesitation, he proceeded with these schemes which could not be completed during his tenure but these schemes have played a great part in changing the face of the city and advancing its welfare. In the case of demolition of the wall around the city, some tried to incite Muslim feelings, which he faced and remained firm and, therefore, his successors could carry on the work.

In order that the citizens could take more interest in the administration of the Government Civil Hospital and Medical School, Sardar requested transfer of these two institutions to the Municipality. After a good deal of correspondence, government refused the request. Therefore, in 1921 he obtained a donation of Rs. 5½ lakhs from Seth Vadiyal Sarabhai and Rs. 1½ lakhs from Seth Chunilal Nagindas Chinai and had them accepted by the Municipality for the construction of a General Hospital on the other side of the river, where the Congress session was held in 1921 and

requested the government for acquisition of 21 acres of land on the bank of the river for this purpose.

A good opportunity of witnessing the capacity of Sardar for organisation and management became available at the time of the Ahmedabad Congress session. Comfortable seating arrangements were made on the sands of the river bank without chairs and that too with the use of sand only. It was necessary to take out shoes and sandals while sitting at the meeting and the problem was of the custody of shoes and sandals. Khaddar bags prepared for this purpose were sold at for annas each apart from safe keeping of the shoes and sandals, a good amount was realised by the sale of these Khaddar bags. Out of the savings of this Congress session, a Congress House at Bhadra was erected. Referring to this, Gandhiji wrote that it has brought credit to Gujarat. Khaddar tents of the value of Rs. 3½ lakhs and arbours were put up, electric connections were provided, a beautiful exhibition was held. *Bhajans* were sung, and the glory of Hindustani music was exhibited. Hindus and Muslims stayed together and not a word was uttered in high pitch. Gujarati girls of tender age worked as volunteers, the young men of Gujarat did sanitary work and served the delegates. A large meeting of women was held and speeches were delivered. Everything was done with great economy and utmost discipline.

When the government superseded the Ahmedabad Municipality on the question of National education, Sardar established a Public Education Association, obtained donations and cooperation from the people and kept these schools going. The Association was conducting 43 such schools in Ahmedabad. For these schools some beautiful buildings of the community 'Wadis' were obtained. Of the 270 teachers 65% were trained. The strength of the students was 8,400 and every month an expenditure of Rs. 10,000/- was incurred on this. As against this in the 57 schools managed by government, 250 teachers were employed and hardly there were 2,000 students. The capacity of Sardar also achieving unity foiled all attempts of government towards enrolling more students in government schools. Even when the elected Municipality came into existence on February 9, 1924, the schools

of the Association were continued. The then Director of Education, Mr. Laurie felt that it was not proper to continue such an awkward situation. He, therefore, through the Educational Inspector, started negotiations. Sardar also as a true Satyagrahi seized the opportunity and with mutual consent a decision was taken to discontinue the schools of the Public Educational Association from September 16, 1924. The Education Department did not raise any objection to the grant of Rs. 2 lakhs paid by the Municipality to this Association. The Municipal teachers who were working in the Association were absorbed in the Municipal service. One intervening period of about about 2½ years was treated as leave without pay and in order that they may not have to suffer in the matter of promotion they were given advance increments for a period of 2½ years.

Thus the benefit of the organising capacity of Sardar was available to Gujarat. This was witnessed at the time of floods in July 1927. It started raining from the night of Saturday, July 23, and it ceased raining on Friday the 29th. From the evening of Sunday along with rains the wind blew with velocity and for almost a week rain and wind played havoc in Gujarat. Since Sunday night Sardar became anxious for the safety of the people. He could not sleep and at midnight he went to Gandhi Road for inquiry into the position. On the way he felt that it would be better if somebody accompanied him, so he knocked on the doors of one brave merchant of the Maskati Market, Shri Kapadia, who on seeing Sardar dripping with water was very much astonished. Sardar changed his clothes, had a cup of tea and then proposed that they go out to see the effect of the storm. The house of Shri Kapadia was not free from danger, still he accompanied Sardar. Moving about in different localities till dawn they identified the places where there was possibility of flood water rising and went straight to the Municipal Engineer. From there, the engineering staff of the Municipality was telephoned. Discussions were held as if a war was on and decisions were taken to break down some of the drains and roads for the disposal of water. In the meanwhile some of the houses started collapsing and, simultaneously arrangements were made to ensure that the debris did not block the passage of water. Thus the city

was saved mainly because of the efforts made by Sardar and the Engineer, Shri Gore moving about in the city in wet and dripping clothes.

Sardar got anxious about Gujarat in the meanwhile. The postal communications were completely disorganised and, accurate information was not available. One could imagine what continuous rains of about 52 inches could do. While in Ahmedabad itself thousands of persons were rendered homeless, how could one be safe in villages against the havoc caused by heavy floods. Sardar made a public appeal in 'Navjivan' to render help liberally at this time of crisis.

In the meantime, the Collector of Ahmedabad received an urgent message from the Collector of Kheda that the Kheda city was surrounded by flood waters and cut off from other parts of the district. The prices of goods had increased tremendously and, therefore, immediate help was requested. The Collector of Ahmedabad realised that it would not yield results if work was carried on at government level and he, therefore, requested Sardar to intervene. Sardar immediately arranged to despatch a railway wagon with food-grains, sugar, kerosene and such other items of daily use to Ahmedabad station and along with five trusted volunteers to arrange for these goods to be sent safely to Kheda. The Collector of Kheda thanked Sardar profusely for this help.

Sardar took an immediate decision to send volunteers to all affected parts to take up the work of relief and survey on hand at once. The organising capacity of Sardar was so strong and the confidence of his colleagues in him was so complete that within four days from the time it ceased raining on 29th, volunteers reached all the flood affected area by walking in waist-deep or knee-deep waters and at several places by swimming.

When information started pouring in after personal inquiries, it was known that most part of Gujarat had been affected by this disaster and houses, the cattle and other goods of the people had been washed away. There were instances where people and serpents had spent days together on treetops side by side without food. Similarly, forgetting caste differences, people, including Harijans

were served and instances were available where people had forgotten differences between Hindu temples, mosques and Jain temples. The devastation was quite extensive. The immediate need was to provide food and clothing and to make land fit for farming, to reconstruct houses and to rehabilitate people.

Sardar accepted this challenge. In order to avoid duplication or waste of effort, all institutions rendering help were asked to channel their donations through Gujarat Provincial Committee. A meeting was convened at Anand on August 15, and the general policy was decided upon that those who were rendered absolutely without means should be provided with free food and clothing. At the same time care should be taken to ensure that a feeling of dependence was not created among the people and the objective of rendering help should be that as soon as possible every one should be able to take care of themselves. Arrangements were made to render assistance to farmers till the new crop was ready. The non-farmers were provided with work in connection with repairs of roads. The total expenditure on this assistance amounted to Rs. 1,86,000.

Sardar insisted that all available land should be utilised for farming. For that purpose an amount of *Tagavi** was given in the form of seeds at low cost and loans were given for purchase of bullocks. In order to keep the prices of food-grains under control Fair Price Shops were started. The Committee sold 80 thousand maunds of seeds at concessional rate and incurred a loss of Rs. 60,000 and on the Fair Price Shops a loss of Rs. 52,000 was incurred. The amount advanced by loans was, however, recovered.

The cattle which were washed away and food-grains which were soiled started decaying. With the help of volunteers, Sardar arranged for their disposal. The water collected in ditches was disposed of by making drains and disinfectants were sprayed where it was not possible to drain away such water.

On such occasions more than the floods, diseases following upon such floods are more harmful. Being vigilant, Sardar arranged

* advance of money made by government to cultivators.

for medicines to combat fever and dysentery. Consequently a newspaper like 'The Times of India' which was pro-government noted in its editorial to the effect that the floods could not make any difference to the well-being of the people and for that Gujarat deserves congratulations.

Thus Sardar arranged all kinds of relief during floods, which involved an expenditure of Rs. 5 lakhs to the Gujarat Provincial Committee and the volunteers got very good training.

The Governor of Bombay toured Gujarat from September 8 to September 15 to see the flood relief work. He appreciated the courage and boldness with which farmers of Gujarat met the challenge that confronted them. He considered it a miracle that immediately on asking by Sardar the relief organisation was set up overnight and the relief work commenced in all the villages at once.

Simultaneously Sardar took up the question of construction of houses with government help. Government agreed to provide loans and a committee consisting a Officer and a representative of the Gujarat Provincial Committee was set up at different places to decide upon the amount of loan. In case of differences of opinion, it was decided that the final decision should be taken by Thakkarbapa and the Government Officer.

It was necessary to ensure that the prices of building materials including wood did not increase. For this, Sardar arranged to open Fair Price Shops dealing in building materials under the supervision of Shri Maganbhai Shankerbhai. In Kheda district alone, building materials worth Rs. 18 lakhs was sold on the basis of loan chits and Rs. 8 lakhs in cash.

At this time Shri Vitthalbhai Patel was the President of the Central Assembly. He persuaded Viceroy Irwin to tour Gujarat. The Viceroy made personal inquiries and at the garden party in his honour organised by Shri Vitthalbhai stated that having seen and heard everything, he was confident that had the volunteers of Gujarat Provincial Committee not reached the flood affected areas in time, loss of life would have been more. The honour of averting this went to the volunteers of the Committee.

In the Bombay Legislative Assembly, the Finance Minister, Sir Chunilal Mehta while presenting the accounts in this connection praised profusely the presence of mind, the intelligence and organising capacity of Sardar Saheb and declared that in the absence of Gandhiji, who was ill at Bangalore, Sardar had done his work admirably.

Government had appointed Mr. Garret as Special Officer for relief. He came in close contact with Sardar and his workers on this occasion. The impression that the non-co-operationists only created confusion for government was removed from his mind. He carried a deep impression of fine cooperation given by them and their organising capacity. He, therefore, asked Sardar once whether he had any objection if he recommended to government to honour them for the good work done by him and his principal colleagues? Laughing heartily, Sardar stated that his colleagues keep miles away from such honours. They find pleasure in doing social work and do not wish for honour or publicity.

During this year in the winter there was heavy snowfall. Sardar wrote in 'Navjivan' that it was a natural calamity. Since the resolution for full independence had already been passed realising that it was not necessary to start any fresh struggle, he carried on correspondence with the Collector, the Commissioner and the Home Member and succeeded in getting relief in land revenue for the farmers.

During this entire period Sardar had in mind only this much that no one in the affected area suffered from hunger or want of clothes or that no land remained without farming for want of farming implements. His wish came true literally, and this was a crowning achievement of his organising capacity. He gave training in relief work to his colleagues on this occasion and created a band of efficient relief workers, who thereafter successfully handled a number of relief work. Simultaneously he reconstructed the villages which had been destroyed. It was the special skill of Sardar to create an organisation, which was beneficial both to the receiver as also to the giver.

India's Sardar

During the Bardoli Satyagraha, an association was established to carry on prohibition activities in Surat and surrounding native States. Consequently, there was awakening among the Raniparaj and Kaliparaj communities and they began protesting against the system of forced labour. The landholders who indulged in the practice of forced and cheap labour were perturbed at this and started assaulting public workers. The officers in the neighbouring Baroda State in conspiracy with these people started harassment of the workers. Sardar told these people and the Baroda State that he had no quarrel with the Baroda State at the moment but warned them that they should not vex the people and take work from them with compassion and prevent their officers from conspiring with the liquor merchants.

At the Raniparaj Conference referring to Vansda and Baroda State, he said that he pitied those States who had no faith in God and who were worried that if people gave up liquor and toddy, then their revenue would be affected. These States should bear in mind that if their officers harassed the people, he would not tolerate it for a single moment.

The 5th Kathiawad Political Conference was convened at Morbi in the last week of March 1929 under the presidentship of Sardar. In concluding the conference, he said in a telling manner that if the people did not support the conference whatever was said at the conference, would be useless. There must be power in whatever they say. There would be no point in merely abusing the native Prince. There is not a single example in the world where a king has been defeated by mere abuse. On the contrary abuse would

make the king shameless. If they want to be effective, they should do service to the State and be in touch with the king.

On this occasion, he expressed some bitter yet necessary truth: He said : “Kathiawad is suffering from pneumonia. A person suffering from pneumonia would tear his own clothes, would prattle and would be unconscious. There is more harm than gain in talking too much. Today, the need of Kathiawad is to talk less and to learn what to talk. If I add to your qualities, then only I would have done service to you. Therefore I must draw your attention to your defects. I would have described your defects with love, if I had a sweet tongue like you, but I am a farmer. It is my inborn habit to tell the truth bluntly. Therefore I request you to learn to make a difference between politeness and flattery. We lack training and organising capacity. We have not developed the habit of carrying out orders. In these days, of the freedom of individual, we equate indulgence with independence. India or Kathiawad does not suffer from lack of leadership. There is no paucity of leaders, on the contrary these are too many of them. What is lacking is the faithful following.”

In May, Sardar was nominated as President of the Maharashtra Political Conference. Sardar felt that Maharashtra was a centre of politicians and the platform of their conference was an arena of pandits, and wondered how far he would be effective at such a conference. But, he accepted the Presidentship, when ordered by Gandhiji. There was an increase in the land revenue in Maharashtra but the plan of the leaders to carry out a struggle against this increase was impractical. About this, he said : “That there is one disadvantage in your advice and no one will be prepared to believe that you really want to carry on a struggle and it will turn out into a game of hide and seek. I suggest in all humbleness that in such struggles, one cannot think about the financial losses. If we wish to make our poor farmers, who are almost like slaves, courageous we will have to develop in them qualities of voluntary self-sacrifice and the courage to endure hardships.”

At the meeting of the Consultative Committee, he proved more than a match to these pandits, who were habituated to hair-splitting

his humorous and sarcastic remarks. One such pandit inquired whether it will be proper if one puts on a Khaddar coat but will put on a mill made dhoti? He replied immediately that one who puts on half Khaddar can give half a vote only. On the resolution about removal of untouchability he had said that this was a stigma on the Hindu religion which ensued into a religious discourse and there was demand for dropping these words. One gentleman inquired how this could be considered a stigma on Hindu religion? Sardar replied by asking whether it could be considered a stigma on Islam or on Christianity? We will record in whatever way you like. Thus by making fun of some and placating others, he conducted the work of the meeting.

In conclusion, he observed that it was necessary to associate with the spirit of sacrifice, austerity and the culture of Maharashtra, the pragmatic approach of Gujarat. 'When there was need of a Shivaji, God gave us Shivaji. When we needed Lokmanya Tilak, God gave us Lokmanya Tilak. Today there is need of Bania leader to carry on a struggle against a trading Raj and, God has given us Gandhiji. You people describe the advice of Gandhiji as the advice of an ascetic. I am not an ascetic. I am not the one to leave the household. I tell even the President of the Central Assembly why are you wasting your time? Come to the villages. We will teach a lesson to the government.

Even if we want to indulge in violent activities, we will not succeed by committing stray murders or bomb explosions. The real question is about timidity and bravery. Gandhiji has not advised anybody to be a coward or to retreat. He had advised facing death openly. Of course, it is not bravery to stab somebody in the back. Will those who want to bring about a revolution, shout from the platform? What is the use of that? Therefore, avoid controversies or pulling each other's legs and work unitedly.'

Sardar was an active person. Like Maharashtra, the poverty of Matar Taluka of Kheda District was well known. An increase in the land revenue would cause hardships to the people. He got an economic survey of the Taluka made through the Gujarat Vidyapeeth and started correspondence with government. In the

meantime, the struggle of 1930 began and all prominent leaders were sent to jail. Yet the case was so strong, that government appointed a Special Officer and accepted a 25% reduction in the land revenue of Matar Taluka.

After the successful conclusion of the Maharashtra Conference, Rajaji invited him to the Tamilnad Provincial Conference. This Conference was convened for considering a change in the objectives of the Congress. This very question was to be discussed at the Lahore Congress within four months' time. Sardar, therefore, replied : "I do not want to add to the controversy by coming to Tamilnad". Consequently, Rajaji wrote to Gandhiji that the whole Province was waiting for Sardar and that Sardar must come to Tamilnad. Gandhiji ordered and Sardar went to Madras.

On way to Vedaranya, the venue of the Conference from the Ashram of Rajaji, there were two or three *talukas* in between. At every *taluka* place, The *taluka* Board and The Municipality honoured him and described him as the prime disciple of Gandhiji and the victorious leader of Bardoli struggle. The discussion at the Conference on the question of a change in the objectives of the Congress took a serious turn. Sardar said : "In Calcutta Congress, we had pledged to forget our differences and to prepare the Nation in a year's time for a great struggle. We have become impatient to change the objectives of the Congress keeping aside the question of preparing the nation for a great struggle. If you cannot carry on any work without a change in the objectives of the Congress, then by all means do change the objectives but it is not so. If we think that we cannot achieve independence through Khadi or removal of untouchability, shall we achieve independence by changing the objectives of the Congress?"

Sardar's speech had the desired effect and everyone became quiet. He moved about in the Province a lot. He delivered speeches at different colleges. Mahadevbhai wrote about these speeches that his English was not elegant, nor was there skill in his words, but the people of Madras who were fond of English language saw in his speeches the same marvel which the farmers of Bardoli saw in

his local Gujarati. The secret of this was his wonderful capacity to fight against injustice and his perennial patriotism. The words which came from the depth of his heart, went home to those who heard him. His imperfect and even grammatically incorrect yet fiery language was able to fire the imagination of those who heard him. He used to tell the truth straightway without fear and that had a magnetic effect.

In his speeches, he observed : “In our country quarrels have increased, parties have increased and the atmosphere has been vitiated. Those, who went to the Legislative Assembly with a view to breaking the Assemblies, have been broken down by the Assemblies.”

On the question of Brahmin and non-Brahmins, he said, “Why should there be jealousy of the Brahmins? What harm have these Brahmins done to you? Are you aware that other ‘Brahmins’ have done more harm to both of you? These rulers who have come from 5,000 miles away, who do not belong to any caste, you Brahmins and non-Brahmins both worship them as ‘Brahmins’, and flatter them day in and day out. Do you want to prevent these ‘Brahmins’ from coercing you or these other Brahmins Even if we assume that the Brahmins have done harm to you, they have not done such to you as the other ‘Brahmins’. Why do you consider these Brahmins higher than you? One who feeds others by farming is the noblest. I belong to the same community. How do you consider them as higher and yourselves as lower?”

An old farmer was so much impressed by the speech that he started moving about with Sardar on his tour. He repeatedly said : “We have not come across till today a man who understands our hardships and difficulties, nor one who can explain to us properly and inspire awareness in us.”

On his way back from Tamilnad, at the request of Gangadharrao Deshpande, he stayed in Karnataka for two days. The meeting of farmers in villages was very fruitful. At each place, he spoke about the need to give up fear of the officers, of confiscation of property, of imprisonment, as also to boycott foreign

clothes, liquor and toddy and courts of law. In his piercing and straightforward talk, Shri Gangadharrao Deshpande heard echoes of the language of his Guru Tilak Maharaj.

He saw in the eyes of Sardar the lustre and anger of Lokmanya Tilak. While Sardar was delivering a speech in Tamilnad, even Rajaji had once observed : “He speaks like Tilak Maharaj”. Mahadevbhai also wrote that after staying with Vallabhbhai for a long time and observing the manner of his conversation, his laughter, his lustre, his affection and ardour, he was reminded more of Tilak Maharaj. Outwardly both appeared proud but were humble at heart. Both had stern exterior but were kind at heart. Both appeared complex but were simple at heart. Both appeared deep but were not so at heart.

Sardar toured Bihar for 15 days in the month of December. Four District Conferences were organised for him at Champaran, Sitamadhi, Gaya and Monghyr. He proved to be a great attraction for the Biharis. They turned up in thousands to hear him with confidence that just as Gandhiji saved them in Champaran, this disciple of Gandhiji would save them from their other calamities.

Some Gujarati words were found in the Hindi speech of Sardar. People did not understand some of these words but got the sense of the same from his eyes. On hearing Sardar's speeches, Brijkishorbabu hinted : “Our farmers wanted only this. The way in which you can give them the slogan of fearlessness, hardly any other person can do it.”

In one of his speeches, Sardar told the farmers: “Just as a bullock is startled by a motor-car, you people get startled by the henchman of government and of landlords. Do these persons have two heads or four arms? Do you have to fear them or they have to fear you? You are the one who feed the world. Who else are as pious as you? I do not say that you are innocent but the least sinful person in the world is one who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow. You do not enjoy the fruits of your labour but you feed others. Without you farmers, the world cannot exist even for a short while and if the world does not exist, how could the landlords exist?”

To the youth shouting slogans of revolution, Sardar advised that they should first bring about a revolution and then shout slogans. “What is the use of shouting slogan about a thing which does not exist? What is the sense in shouting slogans about revolution when you have not been able to bring about revolution in your own lives? You have stuck to old superstitions and customs. You are not prepared to break the custom of ‘Purda’. How can you bring about a revolution while attending schools and colleges?”

Decisions of far reaching importance were to be taken at the Congress sessions to be held at Lahore in December 1929. The confidence of persons like Motilalji in Legislative Assemblies was shaken and there was talk of complete independence. At such a critical time, the question of the Congress President was a matter of great importance. Ten Provinces suggested the name of Gandhiji, five of Sardar and three of Jawaharlal. The younger generation was in favour of Jawaharlal. Gandhiji refused to be President and therefore, Sardar also refused saying that how can a soldier dare to go where the Commander refuses to go?

The Congress passed the resolution for complete independence with Jawaharlal as its President. Thus a clarion call was given at the Lahore Congress. In order to involve himself in this great struggle, sacrificing everything, Sardar, as a preliminary step, left his rented house in Ahmedabad and made the entire country his home. Since he developed an attachment to Bardoli during the Bardoli Satyagraha, whenever in Gujarat he used to stay in Bardoli Ashram. During the five years from 1930 to 1934, the State prison became his home. Therefore his stay in Gujarat became rare. He had to move about in the entire country and shoulder responsibility. Thus he became the Sardar of the Nation.

I Can Live on Air

The Congress Working Committee gave all authority to Gandhiji to decide upon the manner in which the struggle should be carried on or the programme launched, consequent upon the resolution of complete independence passed at the Lahore Session. In his own way, Gandhiji decided upon to defy the Salt Act and for that purpose resolved to undertake a march from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on March 12, 1930. In this connection, he wrote in 'Navajivan' "What has one, who has lost everything to fear about? Therefore, I feel that the path of those who are vowed to non-violence is straightforward. If they could not find a way, other than keeping quiet, their non-violence is of no use. If there is really a group of persons in the country, who believe in non-violence, then they must use their weapon and defeat violence or should sacrifice themselves in this struggle."

The views of Gandhiji were acceptable to Sardar, but in his heart another feeling was uppermost. When Gandhiji was arrested in 1929 and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment, on his advice and through the efforts of the leaders, peace was maintained in the country. Misrepresenting this, Lord Birkenhead announced in the House of Commons : "Not even a dog barked when Gandhiji was arrested and we are proceeding ahead with ease".

Sardar wished that the entire country should be involved in the struggle of Satyagraha when Gandhiji was arrested, all the jails should be filled and government should not get a penny by way of land revenue. Of course, Gandhiji had postponed the question of land revenue. In order to prepare the people for this, he undertook a tour of Gujarat. In his speech at Bharuch, he announced : " In a few days, the civil disobedience movement was to be launched.

This movement was to be organised through persons who were staunch believers in non-violence. A British politician has just now said that when Gandhiji was arrested not even a dog barked. This is true and also false. Gandhiji had suspended the Bardoli struggle and forbidden anyone to court arrest alongwith him. This has been misrepresented by saying that not even a dog barked. When the struggle was on, government was very much worried. The Viceroy himself had confessed that he did not know what to do. The Governor of Bombay had said that independence was within reach.”

“Gandhiji while on the banks of the Sabarmati, has given everything he had. What else he could say now? But the world will ask what you have done? I am asking the farmers and others whether you have faith in God? Do you know that one who is born is bound to die. Nobody can avoid death. You should learn to die as a brave and respectable man rather than as a coward.

History is made, when the cannons boom, bombs hurled from planes and people die in thousands. Such a day would come to us when not a single Gujarati co-operates with the government. Let there be arrests in large numbers. Then the world will know whether a dog barks or something else happens.”

The Dandi March was to commence on March 12, Sardar reached Ras village in Borsad taluka on March 7. Thousands of people gathered to hear Sardar. Before Sardar could start his speech, the Magistrate served him with a notice not to deliver his speech. Sardar expressed his intention to disobey this notice and the police arrested him immediately. They took him to Borsad and made a show of taking action against him. As a true Satyagrahi, Sardar refused to defend himself and the Magistrate sentenced him for “delivering the speech” to 3 months’ imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 500 and if the fine was not paid, imprisonment for another 3 weeks.

He was brought from Borsad to Ahmedabad by car. After taking his meals at Dr. Kanuga’s place, he met all at Ashram and reached the Sabarmati jail. The Superintendent of Police who

escorted him, offered him a cigarette at the gates of the jail. Sardar was about to accept it but refused immediately. The Superintendent observed, “You do smoke.” Sardar replied, “But are you going to provide cigarettes in the jail?” From that moment, Sardar gave up smoking. He did not want to live on the mercy of anyone.

After the arrest of Sardar at the Ras village, the Mukhi, Matadars and Ravaniyas tendered their resignations. Not only that, but 500 persons pledged to join the Satyagraha and the owner of the liquor shop in the village closed his shop.

On the 3rd day, Mahadevbhai paid a visit to Sardar. Describing that visit, Mahadevbhai wrote : “Sardar had the same hearty laughter, the same sarcasm and the same pleasant mood. Who would say that one was paying a visit to Sardar in a prison? Mahadevbhai asked, ‘How do they treat you?’ “I am treated in the same way as thieves and dacoits. I am happy and I did never enjoy like this in my life.” When asked about the arrangements for sleeping, he replied : “They provide a blanket and I sleep on it”. About food, he replied, “What is there to ask about food? Have we come to the prison for pleasure? They give coarse bread and dal in the afternoon and in the evening a vegetable and coarse bread. At least it is fit enough for a horse.” When asked whether there was anything suitable for man, he replied, ‘Yes, outside I had difficulties of hard bowels but coming here, I go for toilet regularly. What else do you need? But why do you worry? For three months I can pull on merely air. Saying that, he laughed whole-heartedly.

In the end, as if he was telling something special, he said, “My pleasure knows no bounds, but I was worried about one thing. All the officers in the jail, right from sepoy to warden, are all Indians. I would have taught them a lesson if these officers were Britishers but how can I do that with our own people? This is an example of how our people have been made into slaves.” Mahadevbhai said in the end, “You are allowed one visit in 3 months and that is already over. I am sorry I will not meet you again.” Sardar replied, “It is not necessary for anyone to visit me. Whenever someone pays a visit, it reminds me that still they are outside.”

Sarcastically, he gave a message to those outside, which the officers did not understand.

For the first time in life, Sardar wrote his diary in the jail from March 7, 1930 to April 22, 1930. One can discern from this diary, Sardar's devout heart, his unlimited love for Gujarat and his affection for Gandhiji. Some of the excerpts from the diary are given below—

“On getting up in the morning, I saw prisoners round about. They had lined up in twos for toilet. There was only one toilet. One had to go for toilet in one place and then for water in another place. This was a new experience and I decided not to go for toilet. For urinating, a pot was kept in the open. And since there was no privacy I was not inclined to urinate in the open.

The jailor and the Superintendent came and inquired whether I needed anything. I replied that I did not want anything by way of mercy and would consider asking, if I knew what I am entitled to by way of right.

Everyone got 2 breads by weight and dal or vegetable by measure. I decided to take only one bread. I used to go for toilet four or five times a day when I was out of jail. While outside, even after taking tea and smoking, the bowels could not be cleaned. Here, there was no such question and therefore, I decided to go for toilet only once a day and ultimately, the bowels could be cleaned after 3 days.

When a warder saw me eating jowar chapatti, he was very much moved. He insisted on exchanging his wheat chapatti with me but I refused to do anything against rules. However, I expressed my thanks to this kind warder.

On getting up early in the morning at four, I said my prayers and read “Gita”. I remembered that Gandhiji was to march from the Ashram today (12-3-30) at 6.30 A.M. I prayed for his success.

Today (6-4-1930), I got up at 4 'O Clock in the morning and prayed for the success in the celebration of the National Week as also for the preservation of the credit of Gujarat.

Commissioner Garret came at 10'O clock. The Superintendent had brought him there. The Superintendent had been asking us to stand erect at the door of the cell, whenever the Commissioner or Collector visited the prison. I bluntly refused and told him that we were not going to do something which would be against our self-respect. We will not be lacking in politeness or courtesy. But we will not accept anything which goes against our self-respect.

When the Commissioner was discussing how the expenditure on the food-bill could be reduced, I told him plainly that we have come here expecting the worst kind of treatment. Even if you decided to spend one Anna per day, we are not going to complain or ask for any favour.

Then we discussed about Bardoli. I told him that when the principal workers were in jail, further inquires should be postponed. When he said that the people are not paying the land-revenue, I said that they should not pay the land revenue. You will now realise the mistake in hoping that it would be possible to collect land-revenue, by sending some leaders to jail. I also told him that I had not come across a strong and strict officer in the Revenue Department like him. I narrated from the beginning to the end how he had plotted in Matar and Ahmedabad. He went away thereafter.”

With the increase in the number of prisoners in the Sabarmati jail, arrangements were made to shift some of them to other jails. Sardar was very much touched on leaving his colleagues. He told Ravishankar Maharaj, Pandiyaji and other: “Wherever you go, you ensure that our self-respect is preserved and take care of our colleagues.”

His philosophy was that he would be considered a coward if he did not give an invitation to government to use its power with full force. The attacks on Dharasana started on May 15. In three weeks' time, three thousand satyagrahis were beaten up severely and two of them died. Describing this, the correspondent of “New Free Man” wrote: “I have worked as a correspondent in 22 countries, during the last 18 years. During this period, I have seen many agitations, rebellions and street-fights. But I have not

witnessed the heartrending scenes which I saw in Dharasana. I was so much pained that I used to move away from the scene. The discipline of the volunteers which I witnessed there was wonderful and I found them deeply in tune with the principle of Gandhiji's nonviolence."

In the meantime, picketting of liquor shops and foreign cloth-shops was being conducted in an effective manner by women. A resolution was passed at village Ras not to pay land-revenue to government. Thus at the time Sardar was released from the prison, Gujarat had given a good account of itself. At the reception given to him, he said : "In the jail, we were not beaten up and did not experience any difficulty. There was comfort there and that too at the expenditure of 4 paisa. At this stage, when the best person in the world like Gandhiji is in jail, to live outside in comfort and eat food squarely is like eating dust. To sleep on cosy mattresses is like sleeping on funeral pyres. To tell you the truth, I felt more comfortable in the prison than outside."

The Congress President Motilalji was arrested on June 30. He nominated Sardar as the President, who started organising the struggle in the entire country. At this time, government by a special ordinance declared the Congress Working Committee and its allied bodies unlawful and sealed their offices. In reply to this, Sardar issued instructions that each and every house in the country should be the offices of Congress Committee and each and every person should become the Congress organisation. As a result of his appeal, Pandit Madanmohan Malaviya accepted membership of the Congress Working Committee.

In the meantime, Jaykar and Sapru were making attempts for a conciliation. Because of these discussions, a misunderstanding was created among the people. Sardar in his own way issued a statement that such mediators wittingly or unwittingly were doing damage to the self-respect of the people and disservice to the country. When there is a change of heart of the government and it realises that the time for conciliations has arrived, it will approach Gandhiji straightway for holding discussions with him in Yaravada

jail. We should not forget that the only way to bring this struggle to its true end is to carry on the work of Congress with full force.

On July 31, on the eve of the anniversary day of Lokmanya Tilak, a big procession was organised in Bombay. Sardar took part in that. An order banning the procession was served at Victoria Terminus Station. The whole procession sat there and there. It was raining heavily and though drenched, all including Sardar sat there for the whole night. Early in the morning, Sardar was arrested and was sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment and sent to Yaravada prison.

Jaykar and Sapru carried on discussions with the Viceroy and Gandhiji. While these deliberations were carried on in the prison, the struggle outside intensified. The police had started confiscating standing crops in Bardoli and Borsad, because of non-payment of land-revenue. Even women were not exempt from the atrocities of the police. People from several villages sought refuge in the Gaikwad's territories, to save themselves from these atrocities. Thus when the time was most opportune, Sardar was released from the prison in November. He began delivering speeches as a result of which the people got excited. Therefore, government issued orders restraining Sardar and Mahadevbhai from making speeches. In reply to this, he told the people : “ You know what is in my heart and nobody could restrain those views of mine”. He told the brave farmers of Bardoli, Borsad and Jalalpur : “I would not mind if they remove from the map the few Talukas which were carrying on this struggle. I will be proud of them. We want to wipe out the present map and draw a new one. In that new map, these Talukas will have a place of pride. A threat is held out that the farmers will lose their lands. If the farmers lose their lands, how would the British government have its existence”

When police entered his home in his native place Karamsad, Sardar's 80 year-old mother was cooking food. The police threw away the vessels containing food and threw stones and kerosene in the pot containing cooked rice and after making everything topsy turvy went away. On this occasion, Sardar advised patience.

It is evident from his letters written in jail that while in prison or outside, Sardar used to look after all his workers. He had spun 9 pounds yarn in Sabarmati and 8 pounds yarn in Yaravada. Government did not want Sardar to remain outside the prison for a long period and therefore, on some pretext or the other, prosecuted him and sentenced him to 9 months' imprisonment. By the time, he served this sentence, the viceroy issued a Notification on January 25, 1931 releasing Gandhiji and members of the Congress Working Committee to pave the way for a conciliation. Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed and the struggle was suspended. During the period of suspension of struggle, Sardar was very much worried, because he could not tolerate the woes of the farmers and in spite of the fact at Delhi level, the officers went on harassing the farmers.

The Congress Session was convened at Karachi on March 31 and Sardar was elected its President. After Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were hanged, the atmosphere was turbulent. The youth were excited. They received Sardar and Gandhiji with black flags. In his short speech as President referring to this, Sardar observed that he was not concerned with the method of work of these youngsters but he bowed down at the patriotism, courage and sacrifice of these youngsters.

The entire country felt that the death sentence should be commuted into life imprisonment but government did not accept this, which only shows the heartlessness of the government.

Addressing the youth and expressing his feelings, he said that Gandhiji was 63 years old and he was 56. "As a matter of fact, we old persons should be in a hurry for Swaraj rather than the young men. We want to see India independent before our death. Therefore, we are in more hurry than you. You people talk of labourers and farmers. It's my claim that I have grown old in the service of the farmers and yet I am prepared to enter into a competition with anyone from among you".

After the Karachi Congress Session, Mahatmaji left for the Round Table Conference. In his absence, the government officers tried their best to violate the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Sardar was very much agitated but he kept calm. Gandhiji returned disappointed

from the Round Table Conference. In the last days of the Conference, the Secretary of State for India, Mr. Hoare had indicated in clear-cut terms that they would have to crush the Congress and therefore, be prepared for it. “We cannot allow Congress to survive, because we have realised from your talks that Congress means revolution”.

Before Gandhiji disembarked at the Bombay port, government had arrested the Frontier Gandhi, Jawaharlal, Sherwani, Tandonji and others. In spite of harassment, Sardar had kept Gujarat quiet and he himself had taken precautions not to walk into the trap set by government and it was not possible for government to find out a reason to arrest him. Sardar tried his best in the absence of Gandhiji to ensure that the Congress was not accused of violating the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and kept the people calm. Government was ready to attack. Gandhiji clarified his position after exchange of telegrams with the viceroy. Consequently, in the morning of January 4, 1932, Sardar and Gandhiji were arrested. Lord Willingdon expected that in about a 6-weeks’ time there would be peace in the country and Congress would be wiped out. This expectation did not materialise and repressive measures were intensified.

While entering Sabarmati Jail, in 1930, Sardar had given up smoking and during his imprisonment in Yaravada, alongwith Gandhiji, for 16 months, Sardar gave up tea also. Sardar was habituated to eating rice twice and he preferred rice of superior quality. He could not help making sarcastic remarks about the rice and vegetables served in the prison. He used to call it fodder for oxen!

When Mahadevbhai joined them in the prison, he was surprised to see that Sardar had given up tea. He asked Sardar why he had given up tea. To this, Sardar replied that he had decided to eat whatever was given by Bapuji and he had given up rice and was eating boiled vegetables and milk and bread. This will power of Sardar indicated his strength of character.

During imprisonment in Yaravada, he used to take pretty good care of Gandhiji and did all his work with pleasure. He started

learning Sanskrit in the prison. About this Gandhiji wrote to Pyarelal, “Vallabhbhai is progressing at the speed of an Arab horse. He does not leave the Sanskrit book. I did not expect this. Nobody could compete with him in making envelopes. He does this without measure and in spite of that, all the envelopes are of the same size. His technique is surprising. He needs no reminder, does everything in time. He keeps nothing pending. Since he had started spinning, he observes the time for it. Therefore, everyday there is improvement in his speed and the quality of yarn spun by him. He never forgets whatever he takes on hand. Where there is such arrangement, there is hardly any scope for confusion”.

In the Yaravada prison, Sardar suffered pain in the nose. He had an old complaint of cold. Just a day before he was arrested in January 1932, he had undergone cauterization of the nose. He had to travel in this condition in the winter of January from Bombay to Poona in a car without screens, which aggravated his nose trouble. On several occasions, when he could not breathe properly, he had to keep awake throughout the night. At that time Gandhiji was also in the prison, he carried on with whatever treatment was given by the jail doctors.

After his release from the prison, Gandhiji became anxious about the nose trouble of Sardar. Sardar wrote to Gandhiji on June 23, 1933. “It was not proper that a doctor from Bombay should stay at Sassoon Hospital in Poona. Besides, the doctor from Bombay may not get all the facilities in Poona and then whose responsibility would it be? When government is advised that there was no alternative to an operation, it will make arrangements for it. It is better to suffer till then. We have come here to suffer and suffer we will. I would request you not to write to the government about this. I will be very much ashamed if it is disclosed that I am ill in the prison. Government doctors will advise government whenever they think proper. Why should we get tired of suffering? After long investigations, government did not agree to provide the necessary facilities to Sardar’s doctors and therefore, he could get himself operated upon as late as in 1932, after his release from the prison.

Sardar's mother expired in November 1932 when he was in the Yaravada prison. Sardar did not prefer any conditional release. After visiting Nasik in about two months' time, on October 20, 1933, his elder brother Vitthalbhai Patel expired in Vienna. Sardar received a number of letters and telegrams of condolences. Sardar sent a message expressing thanks for publication in the press, but when government suggested some changes in the message, Sardar decided not to publish it.

The dead body of Vitthalbhai was brought to Bombay for the last rites. Many insisted that the last rites should be performed by Sardar. Therefore, government proposed conditional release. To this, Sardar replied that he was not prepared for a conditional release. "If you want to release me, then do so unconditionally. Whenever you want to arrest me again, you can do so from wherever I am but I am not going to surrender myself to the police. I know that at this time, my presence is very much necessary outside, but I do not want a release at the cost of my self-respect."

He had great love for Vitthalbhai. In two letters to Shri Mathuradas Trikamji, he expressed his feelings that the first shock was very great. "More than his demise, I felt grief at the fact that he was in a foreign country, where nobody was by his side, to whom he could open his heart. At times. I remember him but it is not very painful now as before."

How deep this grief was could be imagined in view of his reserved nature.

Parental Affection

Sardar and Gandhiji spent 16 months together in the Yaravada jail. When Gandhiji was released from the prison on May 8, 1933, he issued a statement : “It was a matter of joy to have stayed with Sardar Vallabhbhai in prison. I was aware of his extraordinary courage and brilliant patriotism but I have not stayed with him in the manner in which I had the good fortune to spend 16 months with him in the prison. The love bestowed by him on me reminded me of my dear mother. I did not know that he had such motherly qualities. He used to get up from the bed even at my slightest discomfort. He himself used to take care of the smallest comfort of mine. He and my other colleagues were determined not to allow me to do any kind of work. I hope government will believe me that whenever we used to discuss political questions, he always kept in mind the difficulties of the government. I will never forget the way in which he used to worry about the farmers of Bardoli and Kheda”.

Gandhiji realised the motherly heart of Sardar during his stay with him in the prison but it was an innermost part of his character, which was latent behind his stern exterior. During the time he studied law, Sardar stayed with his friend, Kashibhai Shamalbhai in Nadiad. A friend of Kashibhai's father, Dungarbhai Muljibhai of Nadiad, was a wellknown advocate. When Sardar used to stay with Kashibhai, the wife of Dungarbhai expired leaving a boy of 6 months. The mother of Kashibhai brought this child to her home. Kashibhai and Sardar reared the boy like a mother. Sardar used to sleep along with the child and gave it milk during the night two-three times and used to take all the care, like a mother would do of her own child. Sardar took great pains to bring up this child till he

was three. Because of his reserved nature, people would not believe that Sardar had taken care of the child like a mother but he had deep love for his colleagues and workers. He used to look after their welfare on all occasions and made necessary arrangements for their welfare, without anyone knowing about it.

His love could be seen from some of his letters he had written from the prison. In the letter of April 16, 1934 to Manibehn, he had written : “Mithubehn at present moves about in the princely States of Maroli, Rajpipla and Vansda. During the Easter holidays, she took Mangaldas Pakwasa round these places. On return to Maroli, she fell ill at Bombay. Kalyanji was also with them. At present, all Ashrams are closed and therefore, all are staying at Maroli. Kunvarji is there. Chunibhai of Vedchhi and Keshubhai are there. The wife of Chunibhai went to Ahmedabad and fell down from the terrace and was bedridden for a month. Pandyaji is in good health but he takes only milk, since he has lost all his teeth. On release from prison, Ravishanker has gone to Ras village and writes that his health is fine. Old Abbasji has become President of the Praja Mandal. Even at this age, he moves about a lot. He moved about 150 villages and collected Rs. 7,000. Randhir, the nephew of Kanjibhai, was released from the Thana jail recently. Kanjibhai’s elder son (Hitendrabhai Dasai) who is in prison here, will be released next month. Chandrabhai is at Bharuch. Jairamdas is alright, but is suffering from piles. I have written to his daughter Premee to send fruits for him”.

In his letter of April 30, 1934, he wrote : “Uttamchand and Santok have gone to Ahmedabad. Santok was operated upon by Dr. Patel for removal of tonsillitis. He puts up at Sarabhai’s and his niece Kesar is with him. They were arranging to marry this girl of 14 years to a widower, which was prevented by Uttamchand reaching there in time. Chhotubhai Motorwala has gone to Ubhrat alongwith his wife and son, and will stay there for about a month. Chunibhai of Vedchhi, Surajbehn, Gordhanbaba and Keshavbhai also have gone there. Uttamchand and Santok will go there next week. All those who are ill are going to take rest. Manju is to establish a branch in Kadod. At present, she takes only six bananas

and one pound of milk. Kishorlal is still at Devlali under treatment. If he feels better, he will spend monsoon there. Nagindas of the Vidyapeeth has reached there. All are well in Visapur. Only Jugatram has gone very weak. Bhaskar (Dr. Bhaskar Patel) is still at Ahmedabad. Shanta (his wife) is also there. Mangla has appeared for the Matriculation examination. Ravishankar (Maharaj) has returned from Ras village. People there are very unhappy. Ashabhai exhibits great courage. It appears that Ballubhai has earned a good reputation as President of the Ahmedabad Municipality. Dada (Mavlankar) is still at Ratnagiri. For him, good has come out of evil there.

Fulchand Bapuji expired last week. He was very kindhearted and a very seasoned worker. Even though poor, he spent his lifetime in the service of the nation. He died in very peculiar circumstances. There was nobody beside him. His wife had gone to Ahmedabad for treatment of their son. His life-long colleague, Gokaldas Talati was in Bombay on that day. Dadubhai Desai was also there. He went to sleep at 12 'O clock midnight on the terrace and did not get up again. Next day, when the peon of the Committee came he found out with the help of the neighbour, that Bapuji had died of heart failure. I remembered the following Bhajan on his sudden demise :

Whose children, whose progeny, whose mother and whose father,

To leave alone in the end, with one's own righteousness and sins.

Bhaktilakshmi is at Chorvad. Suryakant and Shanta are also there. Mahendra stays with Lallubhai at Bhadran. He has got interested in studies and got admission to the Bhadran High School. The other two children of Darbar Saheb are at Dakshinamurti. They are quite well. Chhaganlal Joshi is at Bhavnagar. He has been declared foreigner and exterminated. The position of Manilal Kothari is the same. He is confined to Joravarnagar. Venilal Buch was released recently and similar orders have been issued in his case also. Keshubhai, Chunibhai and others are moving about in

Raniparaj at present. People were very much frightened but gradually the position is getting normal.

Chandubhai, Kanjibhai, Ravishankar and Chhotubhai Purani have returned from Ranchi and are now trying to collect funds for the farmers. Mrudula had also been to Ranchi and has started a women's institution (Vikasgriha) at Ahmedabad. I hope she has reconciled herself after her return from Ranchi.

The people of Ras village are in agony. Ismail Gandhi of Nadiad with his gang has taken hold of their lands. He camps in the fields and has got licences for fire-arms. The farmers have to live in constant fear, because of this mischievous gang. The work is difficult and the question is how to get over it. It is difficult to stay in the village and therefore people have to migrate to other places. All lands have been taken away. How can one survive without farming? Narendra, the son of Krishnalal of our office, has passed his B. Sc. examination in Second Class. This has been good, since the men are poor and if the boy starts earning, they would be able to maintain themselves in a better way. The boy is good and seems to have studied well”.

In another letter, he writes : “Vishnu, the son of Dr. Hariprasad expired last week due to heart failure. This happened immediately the day after he appeared for the examination. The boy was very good and the doctor is grief stricken but he is a man of courage. Harivadan is still at Ahmedabad. He did not like all activities to come to a dead stop. Pramod, the son of Kanjibhai has returned to Surat, after his release from here. Bhuruji is well and is engrossed in the publication of his newspaper. Bhaskar has taken charge of the hospital in Bombay. But has not established his house yet.

Velabehn has gone to Vadodara. Anandi, Mani and Vanmala are with her. Durga, Amina and Mani are at present in prison but we will have to consider where to put them up on their release. On the suspension of the struggle, Bal and Kanti are in search of facilities for studies.

At present, Bapuji has arranged for Narandas to stay at Rajkot and make arrangements for the studies of all boys of the Ashram in

the school of Jamnadas. The question of Amina and her son would be a vexed one. They will have to think also about Qureshi”.

It will thus be evident that Sardar used to worry about a lot of persons while in prison. He considered so many as members of his family and had deep affection towards his co-workers.

Sardar was a connecting link between small and big workers, involved in the activities of Satyagraha, Khadi, cottage industries, basic education, welfare of Harijans and backward communities and had imbibed in them a family feeling. Whenever he visited different areas, he used to chat with affection with the workers surrounding him and inquired about their welfare and did whatever was necessary for their well-being.

Shri Ravjibhai Manibhai Patel has referred to an incident of 1954. He had visited Abu to see the Ruler of Alwar. Ravjibhai inquired of him of his experience of Sardar Saheb. The Ruler of Alwar replied that Sardar is our elder. He has behaved with us like our parent. He won us over with his love and affection and succeeded in convincing us what was in our best interest. Ravjibhai asked, “But how did you agree to give up your States?”

The Ruler of Alwar was in prayer at that time. He replied “I will tell the truth. He did not exert any undue pressure on us. In the beginning, we were afraid of him and felt that if he used the powers at his disposal and harassed us, then there would be a mutiny of the type of 1857, following the steps taken by Lord Dalhousie. But Sardar did not make an exhibition of his powers. On the other hand, he explained to us with love our self-interest and satisfied us as the parents would satisfy their children. Thus, Sardar Saheb has made us hand over our properties and kingdom to the nation. Such a transfer would not be possible without love, patriotism and generosity.”

Those I.C.S. Officers who came in contact with him during his tenure as Union Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister were also won over by his love and affection. They all remember him even today with great respect and love.

A Strict Custodian

On July 31, 1933, Gandhiji wound up Sabarmati Ashram. In order that the library of the Ashram was put to good use, he handed over the same to the Ahmedabad Municipality. At this time, the Principal of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Shri Kakasaheb Kalelkar was in Poona. When he heard about this, he was reminded of Gandhiji's idea of amalgamating the library of the Ashram with that of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth and he, therefore, came to Ahmedabad and after discussions with Gandhiji decided to hand over the library of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth also to the Ahmedabad Municipality.

Kakasaheb wrote a letter on July 30, 1934 to Gandhiji expressing his views. He wrote : "In view of the fact all of us would be in prison for more than 10 years, instead of allowing the books to rot in the custody of the government, if they are handed over to the Ahmedabad Municipality, people would start making use of them. Of course, there is this drawback that if the Municipality was to be suspended, then it would be like handing over the library to government. But since the Municipality is in the overall hands of Vallabhbhai, if we continued to serve the people, the control of the Municipality will remain with us and on that basis, the suggestion would very likely be acceptable to Vallabhbhai and several others".

On this basis, Kakasaheb wrote another letter to the Collector requesting to exclude the library from the attachment. On acceptance of this request, since he had no time before he left for Poona, Kakasaheb requested Gandhiji to write a letter in this regard to the Municipality. Accordingly, the President of the Municipality accepted the offer of the Library and it was duly handed over.

Sardar and some other members of the Vidyapeeth Mandal were in prison. Those who were outside were informed of this, but the formal consent of the trustees was not obtained. On his release in July 1934, Sardar learnt about this matter. Apart from the question whether it was proper or not to hand over the library, he felt that Shri Kakasaheb had no right to hand over in this manner a property of the trust to some other institution. Not only that, according to him, the Vidyapeeth Mandal also had no right to hand over the library to Ahmedabad Municipality which was under the control of the government. This was because the establishment of the Vidyapeeth was clearly mentioned in the aims and objectives of the Vidyapeeth that it should carry on its educational activities and run their institutions absolutely independent of the government. The handing over of the property of the Vidyapeeth to the Municipality which was under the control of government, would also amount to a breach of trust of the donors who had given donations to the Vidyapeeth having regard to its aims and objectives mentioned above.

Sardar discussed this matter with Gandhiji. It was the weekly day on which Gandhiji used to observe silence, and therefore, the discussion was carried on in writing. When Sardar explained the position, Gandhiji wrote that it was quite clear to him then that Sardar was right and they had no right to hand over the library. He would only add that those in whom this right was vested can get the same back. "If it is our dharma (duty) to get back the books, then, in my opinion they should be got back."

Sardar realised from this discussion that before taking any action, it would be better to obtain legal opinion in this matter. He consulted two well-known advocates, Kanaiyalal Munshi and Bhulabhai Desai and requested them to give an opinion, whether the entire Vidyapeeth Mandal had a right to do so having regard to its objectives, keeping apart, for the present, whether Kakasaheb had that right or not. Both opined that with regard to the principles of the Vidyapeeth, the Vidyapeeth Mandal has no right to hand over any property of the Vidyapeeth to a Municipality which is, in essence under the control of the government. Consequently, Sardar

wrote a detailed letter to the President of the Ahmedabad Municipality stating that the handing over of the library to the Municipality was beyond the rights of those who had done so and that there was a breach of trust if the library remained with the Municipality any longer. He also made it clear that it was not his intention to raise any shadow of doubt about the bonafides of those who handed over the library to the Municipality or of the Municipality in accepting the offer. He hoped that it would be possible to arrange to have the necessary resolution passed by the Municipality and to hand over the library to the Vidyapeeth Mandal.

The President of the Municipality through the Legal Committee obtained the legal opinion of another well-known advocate of Bombay, Shri Bahadurji. His opinion also was similar to that of Sarvashri Kanaiyalal Munshi and Bhulabhai Desai. Therefore, the Vice-President of the Corporation, Dadasaheb Mavlankar brought before the General Board a resolution for handing over the library back to the Vidyapeeth. In giving details of the case, he had mentioned that, having regard to the legal opinion, it would not be fit for an institution like the Ahmedabad Municipality wedded to the welfare of the people to enter into a legal battle in a court of law and spend the people's money there. They should instead set an example to the people that they are for justice, true and fair. Simply because the library is in their possession, they should not force the other party to go to a court.

The resolution was passed by 24 votes in favour and 5 against and the library was handed back to the Vidyapeeth. In spite of this, there was dissatisfaction in the Vidyapeeth Mandal and its workers. They felt that this happened because Sardar disliked Kakasaheb. In fact, we can see today, that the step taken by Sardar was not only perfectly reasonable but also extremely foresighted. He found out internally that the library was a very important part of an educational institution like the Vidyapeeth and that without it, the Vidyapeeth will not be a model educational institution, it claimed to be. Once the position was clear to him, he did not shrink from taking action for fear of anybody or incurring the displeasure of anybody. He used to point out the faults of anybody with courage and almost

invited and incurred the wrath and misunderstanding of many. In the interest of Public good, he acted as an ever-vigilant watchdog.

That very year, after release from prison, Sardar took up the work of fighting the plague that had broken out in Borsad Taluka. It was unexpectedly successful, in the sense that this disease, which was recurring for the previous four years, was not only eradicated but it did not recur. This naturally earned the goodwill of the people. Hence it was not liked by the government and it, issued a statement that the attempts of private individuals in eradicating the plague, are not likely to be successful. Such efforts should have a scientific basis as well as the benefit of long experience which is available only with the health department of the government. Therefore, people should work in co-operation with the health department of the government so that better results could be achieved.

In this, there was not even a single word of appreciation of the work of eradicating the plague undertaken under the leadership of Sardar on voluntary basis at the risk of their lives but there was an attempt to discredit it. As a vigilant and watchful public leader, he issued a rejoinder providing sufficient evidence of the carelessness shown by government for 4 years and at the same time supporting the same by evidence of the selfless work done by the voluntary workers at the risk of their lives. In reply, government issued another statement. Sardar replied to this and, therefore, government issued a third statement and Sardar asked for an independent inquiry in the matter. Government did not give any reply, so as a careful public leader, Sardar himself appointed an Inquiry Committee consisting of barristers like Bahadurji, Dr. Bharucha, Dr. Guilden and Shri Vaikunth Mehta. After sifting the evidences and examining the details carefully, the committee reported that, in the matter of eradication of plague, the officers of the Health Department had shown gross negligence. They had not cared to implement what they called scientific methods. The measures suggested by the Congress were simple enough to be put into practice by the people and were quite justified from the scientific point of view also. They concluded that the work of eradication of plague which was rampant for 4 years in the area

was achieved in such a smooth way because of the popularity and efficiency of Sardar Vallabhbhai, Dr. Bhaskar Patel and a host of brave volunteers. The entire matter was, thus, clarified in the public eye.

After release from prison, in a statement he gave reference to socialism, as watchman of workers of Gujarat. This resulted in incurring the enmity of many but, giving expression to what he felt strongly from the practical point of view, he stated that :“I hope that the trained workers of Gujarat will not be prey to building castles in the air or waste time and energy in unfruitful discussion of enormous schemes meant for distant future. If we perform our task of the day with devotion, what is required to be done tomorrow, will be clear to us easily and in time and the complications that, in view of the welcome experiences of quiet constructive services of the last 15 years, you will not be interested in endless discussions of new schemes and programmes. Let those who want to indulge in empty talk, do so. We have no time to enter into discussions with them. It is not going to be useful either. If we continue our constructive work, the voice of such work will silence those who indulge in tall talk.”

“I can work with any ‘ism’ provided that no one takes undue advantage of me. If I find anybody taking undue advantage of me, I get in a way scared and keep away from it. I do not want to enter into a quarrel with socialists. I do not want to put aside my duty for the day by entering into a controversy about the future system of administration and the social set-up then. If we perform our duties of the day, the question of tomorrow will be automatically solved. But, if we give up our duties of the day and quarrel over our future course of action, it is not going to help any party. I have no dislike for the socialists but I strongly object to the manner in which the socialists work in the Congress. I have never made a secret of my dislike in this respect any time.”

It was decided at the Congress Session held in 1934 to contest elections to the Legislative Assemblies according to the Act of 1935. The financial and strategic responsibility of these elections

were entrusted to Sardar as the President of the Congress Parliamentary Board. The elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were to be held first. For this, Dr. Deshmukh and the then President of the Bombay Congress Committee, Mr. Nariman were selected to contest the election from Bombay. There was another candidate, Sir Kavasji Jahangir. Nariman, suggested to the Congress to contest election on only one seat. This was not expected of a man of his stature. Though Nariman was selected to contest the election, he showed extreme hesitation in filing his nomination papers and showed excuses. Consequently, Kanaiyalal Munshi was selected to contest the election. Thereafter the election to the Legislature Assemblies were held; Nariman was elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly. His expectations were that the Congress party in the Bombay Legislative Assembly, will elect him as a leader.

In the meantime, the part played by Nariman at the time of election to the Central Legislative Assembly, became known to people. When, Nariman showed several excuses, Sardar had clearly conveyed to him the consequences of this indiscipline. However, ignoring his warning, he did not file his nomination papers. Because of all this, he was not elected as a leader of the Congress party in the Bombay Legislative Assembly and instead elected Balasaheb Kher as the leader of the party. Thereupon Nariman made a public accusation that Sardar has pulled his personal weight against him and saw that he was not elected the leader thus perpetrating injustice to a member of a minority community. He carried on a ceaseless malicious propaganda in the press and created an overall impression that this was because Nariman did not agree to the Sardar's line. The controversy persisted and ultimately the Congress Working Committee, with the consent of Nariman, appointed Shri Bahadurji and Gandhiji as adjudicators. Bahadurji was a well-known Parsi barrister of Bombay. After examining all papers, Bahadurji declared that Nariman himself was in the wrong and exonerated Sardar fully. Nariman accepted this in the beginning, but later on went back on his word. Therefore, in 1937, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution removing him from the party. Exactly, after 10 years at the end of 1947, Nariman expressed regret before Sardar

and re-entered the Congress. In the election to the Bombay Municipal Corporation, he contested the election on the Congress ticket and was elected the leader of the party in the Corporation. But, he could not work for a long time, because when he had gone to Delhi in connection with a case on October 4, 1948, he died as a result of sudden heart-attack. The hotel authorities informed Sardar about this and he sent a Parsi officer to the hotel, informed his brother and wife and according to their wishes, arranged to send Nariman's mortal remains to Bombay by a special plane. He insisted on observance of high discipline in the interest of the party and kept an eye on everyone. He did not tolerate any lapse on the part of anyone however highly placed but overlooked minor human lapses.

A similar example of strict surveillance but inviting bitterness was that of Dr. Khare and his ministry. The Congress ministry was constituted in Madhya Pradesh under the leadership of Dr. Khare. One of his ministers, misusing his position saw that there was reduction in the sentence passed against one of his relatives involved in moral turpitude. This resulted in tarnishing the image of the Congress ministry in the public. It was an evident case of misuse of power in favour of one's own relative. After this incident, there was a split of opinion between ministers from Mahakoshal and those from Nagpur, which ultimately turned bitter. In order to find a solution to the problem, the parliamentary board invited all concerned, heard them and presented a solution accepted by all. Deliberately spurning the decision of Parliamentary Board, Dr. Khare tendered the resignation of his ministry to the governor and formed a new ministry dropping those whom he disliked. Sardar could not and would not tolerate such open defiance of discipline. He immediately moved the Parliamentary Board and removed Dr. Khare. As a result of this, Dr. Khare and the Marathi Press, attacked Sardar alleging all kinds of narrow parochialism, groupism, high-handedness and anti-Maratha spirit. But Sardar was not deterred by this. He believed that an institution particularly one which was important to achievement of independence, and the welfare of the people, should have a strong organisation. Referring to this characteristic of Sardar, John Gunther, a political critic of

international reputation in his book *Inside Asia* has remarked that Sardar used to move in Congress circles, as Caesar used to move in Rome.

After the Haripura Congress, the question of the President of the Tripura Congress cropped up. Subhaschandra Bose declared his own candidature. This was in contravention of Congress tradition. Sardar opposed the election of Subhasbabu on grounds of malpractices in membership and other grounds. Even though he invited the wrath and displeasure of Subhasbabu, Saratbabu and many others, he did not deter. His devotion for the Congress organisation was steadfast and eternal.

Acharya Kripalani in one of his articles in 1969, had observed that when he was the Congress President after independence, in many basic matters, he had difference of opinions with both Jawaharlal and Sardar and had, therefore, resigned from the President of the Congress. "At this stage, in true historical perspective, I would like to state that while Jawaharlal was suggesting some sort of a compromise Sardar wanted my resignation to be accepted. He insisted that Rajendrababu should give up his important portfolio of Food and Agriculture and be the President of the Congress. This was against the wishes of both Gandhiji as well as Rajendrababu. Sardar had done this in order to absorb the shock the nation would experience as a result of my resignation and stabilise the image of the newly formed government. He had acted apparently against me, but this was a very tactful and statesmanlike move to save the new government which had to face enormous problems, which it cannot do without the confidence of the people."

What better tribute could be paid to the ability of Sardar than this.

Land Will Come Back Knocking Our Doors

The attitude adopted by Sardar about the confiscated land of the farmers of Borsad and Bardoli in the no-tax movement of 1930 was unequivocal. He was of the firm view that whenever there was a political settlement with the government, the land should be restored to the original farmers. Gandhiji made it clear while negotiating formula about this land which was not acceptable to Sardar would not be acceptable to him. The Viceroy was agreeable to the restoration of the lands which were still not sold but in the case of land which was already sold, he had his own difficulties. When the no-tax campaign was in full swing the Viceroy had written to the government of Bombay assuring that under no circumstances, will he ask the government of Bombay to restore the land which was already sold to others. Gandhiji said that if nothing could be done in respect of land already sold, he will have to give up the negotiations. He added that in this matter, he had come with a mandate from the Congress Working Committee. In Gujarat, he basked in the popularity due to the glory of Sardar Vallabhbhai and, therefore, he had to be guided by Sardar in this matter. Ultimately, a solution to this question was forged through the formula that in such circumstances a third party should intervene for the restoration of the land by purchasing it on behalf of the farmers. Government in that case will not only not take any objection to such a transaction but would extend all necessary help and assistance needed.

After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Gandhiji explained to the farmers of Bardoli and Borsad that it was certain that their land which was sold to others would not be ultimately lost to them. The only thing

they expect is compensation on account of the intervening losses they suffered as they did not expect any return for any loss of life in freedom struggle or compensation for imprisonment. However, the land had to be restored. He himself did not promise the restoration of this land. It was Sardar who had done this. He added, "But, I have no doubt that, this land will be restored to you. When and in what manner this will happen cannot be said, but one thing is certain that it will be done. This question of restoration of confiscated lands would be a genuine test for Sardar and myself. I will not consider us to have gained independence till it is restored."

Once the Home Minister of Central Government, Sir Henry Craik while talking to Shri Ghanshyamdas Birla mentioned Sardar Patel when G.D. Birla invited both of them to his place for tea on February 6, 1935. The Home Minister spoke of the good intention of the British Government and that they really wanted to give responsible government to India. Sardar, immediately cracked : "We did not see any signs of good intentions of the Britishers. Even now, all our Ashrams and educational institutions are in the custody of the government. No care is being taken of the buildings of these institutions and hence they are being destroyed."

The Viceroy Lord Willingdon was neither willing or inclined to meet Gandhiji or any Congress leader. Even then, the Governor of Bombay Sir Roger Lumley had a private talk with Sardar on August 20, 1935. Sir Roger said that with the implementation of the new Government of India Act he had no doubt that Sardar Patel be the Chief Minister of Bombay. In reply, Sardar categorically said that he was prepared to give in writing that he was not going to be the Chief Minister. Then they talked about the confiscated land. The Governor asserted most emphatically that Sardar should not hope to get these lands back. In reply to this, Sardar equally emphatically asserted that lands in question will go back to the farmers knocking their doors.

When the Congress decided to participate in the election to the Legislative Assemblies, they had declared in their manifesto that if the Congress secures a majority and comes to power, one of the tasks to be performed will be to restore the lands and immovable

properties lost by the people during the no-tax campaign. This problem was basically confined to Bombay province and that too, essentially Gujarat. While the struggle was on, Gandhiji and Sardar had given a solemn assurance to farmers who had taken part in the struggle : “Let the government confiscate your lands and immovable property and dispose of the same but till the properties are restored to you, our struggle will continue.” When these properties were being sold at a throw-away price, Sardar had particularly emphasised that these properties were like mercury and those who purchased it will not be able to retain them.

On formation of the ministry in Bombay, it was necessary to implement the promise given by the Congress, and therefore the Bombay Legislative Assembly passed a resolution to the effect that the lands which were sold by auction in this particular case should be re-purchased from the buyer by the government at their expense and returned to the original owner.

In implementing the decision the officers were placed in a fix. When these lands were auctioned, the officers had given assurance to the purchaser that these lands were theirs for all times to come. The auctions are usually held in the public, but in this case, it was difficult to find a purchaser as most people were sympathetic towards the Congress and the farmers. Therefore, in relaxation of the rules of the auction, government servants were also permitted to purchase this land. These government servants and their agents had actually conspired and secured the land at a nominal price through a make-believe auction procedure.

Another difficulty was in the person of the Commissioner of the North Division, Mr. Garret. He had not only given assurance at the time of this auction, but also had obtained the assurance from the Governor that these properties so auctioned will not be re-acquired. He, therefore, tried to delay the procedure and create hindrances. For example, one Sardar Garda who had purchased 400 acres of land in Bardoli and Jalalpur Taluka at only Rs. 5,000 demanded 3½ lakhs of rupees. When the government offered him Rs. 12,000 he came out saying that Mr. Garret had promised him 2½ lakhs of rupees. In spite of such adverse instances several

gentlemen returned land on payment of the original price. However, the question was not fully resolved. After waiting for a year, the government moved the legislature to pass the Act in 1938 for acquisition of these lands at a price to be adjudicated upon by an officer of the rank of a High Court Judge. Several necessary details were incorporated in the Act for smooth process and for the payment of reasonable compensation to the purchasers.

Consequently, some newspapers criticised that this Act was tantamount to snatching away the property from their lawful owners. Explaining this in 'Harijan', Gandhiji observed that instead of confiscating the lands which were purchased unjustly, purchasers were paid compensation which amply demonstrates the generosity of the government.

Thus when the confiscated lands in the no-taxation campaign were restored to the farmers without any effort or damages to them, Sardar's promise was totally fulfilled which naturally led to a regeneration of faith and devotion in the farmers. Sardar was anxious to form a ministry even only for this purpose. In spite of various obstacles, the lands came knocking the farmers' doors and provided a noble example of his firm determination, and a will to achieve.

A similar complicated issue was the release of the political prisoners. In its election manifesto, the Congress had declared that the release of the political prisoners will be their pious duty. After the formation of the ministry in 1937, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar resolved to release all political prisoners but the Governor raised objection in some cases and the ministries in both the provinces on the advice of Sardar and Gandhiji tendered their resignations in protest after the Haripura Congress where the issue was debated. This gave rise to a constitutional crisis. While moving the resolution before the Haripura Congress, Sardar observed : "When we accepted the office, the British Empire, the Viceroy, the Governors knew very well that we were going to release all political prisoners as so clearly stated in our election manifesto. The Governors are amenable to the release of those not involved in violence as a first step and then examine the remaining cases each on individual

merits. Our ministers after examining the cases resolved for the release of all prisoners. The Governors have raised some objections or the other in some cases. Our ministers have stated that we want to release all political prisoners and if these people after release from the prison, revolt, or create trouble then we will deal with them properly including re-arresting them because administration of law and order is our responsibility.

It is said that if these prisoners are released, there will be a revolt in Punjab and Bengal, and the peace and tranquillity in these two provinces will be in jeopardy. I cannot believe how there will be a breach of peace in these two provinces only because of the release of 15 persons in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. If the ministers of Punjab and Bengal are afraid of these fifteen people from other parts of India, then they must be totally and absolutely unfit for their post. How can we keep in prison those persons who have suffered so long for the freedom of the country? Their methods of work may not be correct or to one's liking but their patriotism cannot be questioned and hence they cannot be permitted to rot in prison any longer."

Apart from this outward manifestation of the issue, the basic and fundamental question was whether the Governors intended to interfere in the day-to-day administration of the popular ministries. Fortunately, after the resolution of the Haripura Congress, the Viceroy issued a statement clarifying that there was no such intention and the Governors of both these provinces after consultation with the ministries concurred for the release of the prisoners. Thus, another resolve of Sardar was fulfilled and all prisoners were released. It had an electric effect on the entire sensible citizenry of India and created a confidence in the strength and promises of the Congress.

There was heated discussion on the question of launching self-rule struggles, in the native states. The discussion took a serious turn at the Haripura Congress because just before the Haripura Session, a conference of the representatives of the political institutions of native states was held in Navsari. They had suggested a change in the constitution of the Congress to the effect that the

word 'India' meant "the People of India including the citizens of the Native States". They had also suggested that they should appoint a committee to inquire into the rights of the citizens of such states.

Gandhiji and Sardar firmly believed that still there was not awakening in the people of the these states sufficient enough to enable them to sustain a struggle against these states. Besides, they did not consider it necessary to launch such a struggle in the Native States because the existence of these states depended entirely on the British. Once we settle accounts with the British Raj, the question of the states will solve automatically because the Native States did not have any intrinsic power of their own. Both believed that instead of launching a struggle in the Native states thus fighting on many fronts the essential was to unite the people and bring about an awakening in them through constructive work.

Speaking on the resolution in this respect, Sardar clarified that for the present, the field of struggle for the Congress was the British territory. He also said that Congress does not want such a federation in which the citizens of the these states lived in slavery while the rest of India enjoyed freedom. He added that they would not accept a federal constitution where the citizens of these states were granted not the rights equal to those of the people of British India.

Speaking at the Faizpur Congress on this subject, Sardar reiterated his own confidence in the policy pursued by the Congress and as if prophesying said that the goal of the Congress is complete independence for the entire India which includes all the Native States of India. These states are an internal part of India and cannot be separated from it. They should get the same political, social and economic independence as the rest of India. His thesis was that once the British leave the country, the integration of Native States would not take much time.

We now know in how short a span of time after the achievement of independence by his determination, persuasion, and strength, he made these states an integral part of India and fulfilled his promise. That exhibits Sardar's skill, foresightedness and capacity to evolve useful strategies to achieve the desired end.



With elder brother
Vitthalbhai Patel



With family

During the Simla Conference with
Mahatma Gandhi, July 1945





With Nehru



Taking the oath of office as Deputy PM



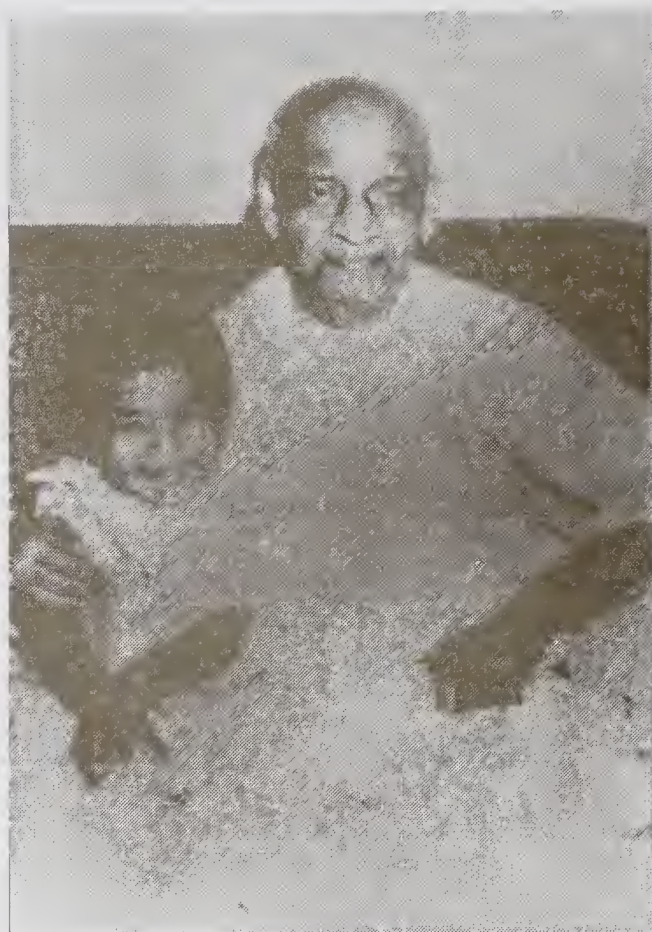
Broadcast to the nation (14 August 1949)



Signing of the Constitution (26 January 1950)



Popular Leader



With grandson Gautam



With daughter Maniben

Self-Sacrifice

Among the struggles lunched in the Native States, one was launched in Rajkot. Once upon a time the father of Gandhiji, the late Kaba Gandhi was a Diwan in this state. The former Thakor, Shri Lakhaji Raj respected Gandhiji like his father and on occasions, used to invite Gandhiji to Rajkot and pay him great respect. In the Durbar, he used to have Gandhiji on the throne and himself used to sit on his left side. When Jawaharlal once visited Rajkot, he was given public honour. The king was a fearless, courageous and patriotic. He was not afraid of the political agency but always worked for the happiness of his citizens. To provide participation of the people in the administration of the state, he had established a representative assembly and the administration of the state was conducted on the advice of this body.

After his demise, the situation took a turn. The prince had been educated in the Rajkumar College, Sardar used to say that this college turns a man into a beast. Those who knew the names of the different varieties of liquor and were used to drinking them were considered smart and the college trained the princes in the art of staying aloof from their subjects. After turning them into beasts they are sent to England and when they returned they were almost beastly. The same had happened to the Prince of Rajkot. He was always in the company of prostitutes and drunkards. His Diwan was Darbar Virwala. The Prince was guided completely by him. He squandered away the wealth he inherited from his father as well as the income of the state in luxurious life. In order to increase the revenue to meet the deficit, the Diwan began to auction contracts for match-boxes, sugar, ice, cinema, etc. He also started selling away or mortgaging buildings owned by the state. He brought to

the state a gambling institution called 'Carnival'. Agriculture and commerce were in doldrums because of innumerable taxes. In the state owned textile mill, labourers were required to work for 14 hours. When it was opposed, the labour leaders were expelled.

In order to register the people's protest against this end particularly against the gambling activities on 'Janmashtami' day, a meeting was held on August 15, 1938 under the leadership of Shri Dhebarbhai. Though this meeting was held within the precincts of the political agency at the specific instruction of Virawala, the people were beaten up. When they entered Rajkot territory, the police charged upon them. Dhebarbhai and other leaders were injured and arrested. Because of this cruel lathi-charge, people got scared and distressed. However a strike call was successful. On the release of the leaders on the 'Janmashtami' day, it was decided to hold the Rajkot State Political Conference, on September 5, under Sardar. The attempts of Virawala to see that the conference was not held and Sardar did not remain present were foiled by Sardar. A resolution for responsible government in the state was passed at this conference, explaining this, Sardar said : "As you know the Haripura Congress had exhorted citizens of princely states to rely on their own strength. This principle is wellknown. One cannot go to heaven without dying. If a neighbour dies, we cannot enter heaven. The same applies to independence. If we want independence, we have to rely on our own internal strength. The citizens of Rajkot should not expect to achieve independence on the strength of the Congress. For that, they will have to be prepared for necessary sacrifices. If you are determined, no one can stop your progress. Even if all the Princes joined forces against you, they will not be able to do anything."

After the conference, Darbar Virawala invited Sardar for tea and initiated talks for a compromise. Sardar sent a scheme. In the meantime, at the instance of Virawala, the Prince invited the 72 year old former Diwan of Junagadh, Sir Patrick Cadell who carried on unsuccessful negotiations. Thereafter, Dhebarbhai embarked upon a Satyagraha by a public auction of the match-boxes covered under the auction contract. This Satyagraha spread to the villages and the situation became serious. Sir Cadell wrote a letter to Thakor

Saheb drawing his attention to the deteriorating situation whereupon Virawala saw that he was removed.

The struggle continued for a long time. A settlement was reached with Sardar, but since the Resident was against it, Virawala did not implement it. Gandhiji undertook a fast in protest against this breach of trust. The Viceroy interfered and the Chief Justice of India gave a verdict that there was a breach of settlement, Virawala raised various obstacles in the way of smooth implementations. A violent gang of Bhayats, Darbars and Mohemedans tried to gherao Gandhiji at the prayer meeting. There was a conspiracy to attack Sardar also. Skillfully, Sardar made both the attempts unsuccessful. Gandhiji in his historical articles in “Harijan” under the captions “Himalayan Blunder” and “I am defeated” analysing this, reiterated the basic confidence of Sardar and observed : “I am confident that, in the end, there is no alternative but to give to the citizens of Rajkot what is due to them. If there is an iota of self-respect in the citizens of Rajkot, they should refrain from associating themselves with the proposed truncated reforms. If the people believe in me, they should wait, pray and spin. They will realise that by doing so, they will be able to achieve independence in Rajkot by the only true method of non-violence. Sardar, without a murmur accepted the advice of Gandhiji to reject the halfhearted reforms and relieving the Prince from the duty of implementing it. That was not blind faith. In a public meeting, Sardar observed that some people believed that Virawala has given him a slap in the face, but they do not realise the forces working behind all these. How all this happened, will be known only when the curtain of secrecy is lifted in the future. God alone will give justice and justice is being meted out by Him to those who have caused grievous pain and distress to a saint in Rajkot. Those who know what happened to Virawala, will agree how well this was borne out.”

After this, the Vadodara State Prajamandal invited him as the President of its conference. In fact, when the resolutions passed by the State Prajamandal were sent to Vadodara State by post, the officers used to put a remark “File” and be done with it. Thus the Prajamandal

was totally ignored. They believed that if Sardar was invited as President, the officers will not be able to do this. Sardar was aware of all the difficulties and informed the conference that if the workers of the Mandal were dishonoured in the eyes of the people in this manner and it has not the capacity to remove the difficulties and grievances of the citizens, then the Mandal must think of its future plan and programmes seriously. If the state is bent upon wiping out the Prajamandal or to make it weak and paralysed by destroying its prestige, then it is the duty of each and every member of the Mandal to sacrifice himself without fear but politely at the earliest and without any hesitation. It would not matter if such persons are very few. By sheer sacrifice of such determined martyrs, the injured soul of the Prajamandal will be revived and will make it worthy of the respect of the state and the people.

Speaking at this conference about the critical financial position of the farmers and unbearable burden of revenue, he said: “You cannot feed the farmers by passing resolutions nor the taxes or land-revenue is going to be decreased by pious resolutions. It is the duty of the Prajamandal to move about in villages from cottage to cottage and to share the difficulties of the farmers and train the farmers to raise voice to such a pitch that it reaches home to the state. If this right is taken away, then the workers of Prajamandal should oppose by offering civil disobedience. To give up these primary rights, would mean suicide of the Prajamandal. If the citizens bear all these insults without any murmur, they are a burden to the nation”.

As a result the workers got electrified. They moved from village to village and carried the message of the Mandal to the people. The state in turn, awakened to the situation and reduced the revenue by Rs. 20 lakhs, extended the electoral rights, and increased the representation of the people in the state assembly. Some officers of the government got panicky at this and when Sardar visited Baroda in 1939, they engineered a heinous attack on him.

However, with God's grace, he escaped unscathed. A host of volunteers and workers were injured in the clash but they got their satisfaction when Sir Pratapsinhrao Gaikwad, who was also at the

back of whole affair, got the honour of driving Sardar in his own car when Sardar visited Baroda as Deputy Prime Minister.

In Limdi also a struggle sparked off between the prince and the people. The state was small and the taxes were very heavy. 50% of the state revenue was spent on the royal family and the rest on their services. Not even 1% was spent on the welfare of the people. The state Prajamandal convened a conference and as a result of which the irate state attacked the workers; inhuman tyranny was afflicted and a sizable section of the population migrated from the state. The Yuvraj who looked after the state administration was very sweet in tongue but equally vindictive otherwise. The cotton from Limdi was boycotted and the migration of people continued. After long suffering and determined continuation of the struggle the state yielded in 1944-45. The lands of the farmers which were confiscated were returned to them and the people who had migrated were honourably permitted to return.

Just then Bhavnagar Prajamandal invited Sardar. He landed at the Bhavnagar aerodrome on May 14, 1939. He was accorded a grand reception while simultaneously a conspiracy was also hatched. When the procession reached Nagina Masjid, an armed crowd of Mohamedans rushed from the Masjid. Their intention was to attack Sardar but his car was a little behind in the procession. Nanabhai Bhatt, a veteran Gandhian suspected foul play and stood in between like a human wall, alongwith other colleagues. The crowd attacked them. Sardar was saved but two persons were done to death and several others including Nanabhai were seriously injured. Referring to this, Sardar observed : “It is only on such innocent sacrifice that the people are trained for freedom and their conscience is awakened. It is our pious duty towards those who have lost their lives, that we should not, in anger, do something which spoil their ‘holy’ sacrifices. We all know that after independence, the Maharaja of Bhavnagar was the first prince to approach Mahatmaji and offered total Swaraj to his people.”

On the occasion of this conference, he also spoke of two other things. One was : “If we did not sink our internal differences and dissensions, isolate unruly elements and uproot them, they will be

a menace to the entire society. I want unity among all communities but if we want to preserve real unity, then we should find out which persons are at the root of these incidents. We should not give an impression that we are either fools or weaklings. Those who sheltered such murders or show sympathy towards them, are more dangerous and are real culprits. We will have to consider how long we can maintain friendship with them. We will also have to be clear about how deep we want to thrust our hand in the hole of a serpent”.

The Ruler of Mansa in North Gujarat declared an increase in the land revenue. In addition, there were different kinds of taxes so people were very much distressed and in 1938, they started a Satyagraha by not paying the revenue. The farmers appointed their own assembly, and started executing their orders instead of those from the state. There were lathi-charges, firings, but the farmers and their women folk carried on the struggle bravely. When the farmers did not give in, the ruler was frightened and by nominating Sardar as the adjudicator he restored peace. Like the citizens of Mansa, those of Vala, Ramdurg, Jamkhandi, and Meeraj established their rights by bravely facing all consequences.

The philosophy of Sardar was quite clear. He used to say: “Our welfare is not in the hands of either the state or the landlords. Our welfare is in our own hands.” On one occasion, he had made it clear to workers that it was extremely important to bear in mind that ultimately, it would be through their own sterling character that they would be able to make an impression on the people. The people are impressed only by the sacrifice, self-control, selfless service and patience of the worker. In spite of all ups and downs, a public worker can find a permanent place in the heart of people only by these qualities of character.

Facing Death Bravely

When the Second World War broke out the British government, ignoring the popular ministries, declared that India had joined this war. The Congress inquired about the objectives of the war so that it can decide whether to associate with it or not. There was no clear-cut reply available from the government. The ministries, therefore, tendered their resignations. The negotiations that started lingered for almost a year without any definite result. Maulana, Sardar, Jawaharlal and Rajaji against the advice of Gandhiji agreed for participation in this war of violence but no useful purpose was served. Individual Satyagraha was launched and negotiations ensued thereafter. The Cripps mission came to India. In the words of Gandhiji, “Cripps offered a post-dated cheque on a failing bank.”

During all these discussions however, one thing clearly emerged that the government had no intention of granting independence to India. The intention appeared to be to meanwhile tide over the difficulties of the World War and then to do what it liked. Gandhiji or Congress did not wish to embarrass the British Empire at a critical time, but the situation took such a turn that in the interest of the country and its natural right for freedom, the Congress had to take some positive action. Ultimately, Gandhiji gave a clarion call for ‘Quit India’ Movement.

During this period, Sardar was also experiencing an understandable uneasiness and perplexity. His main worry was how the country can be sustained during this critical period and how the honour of the country be maintained. On the Independence Day, he appealed to the people of Gujarat to ensure that not a single man remained hungry. Give the hungry work and bread. Each village

should arrange for its own defence and protection. There should be a village Panch which should resolve all internal differences and settle all disputes. “We are heading towards a critical time. Therefore forget all differences of high and low, of caste and class and, be united. Let us be our own watchman.”

Meanwhile his intestinal trouble became acute and he took rest at Hajira. After that, he undertook a ten days’ tour of Gujarat and boosted up the morale of the people. He said in a meeting at Anand, “When such a terrible war is going on, one man with his feet firmly on ground, says that those who are fighting with sword, will be brought down by the sword itself. When they are defeated, they will accept that non-violence is the most excellent way of life.

We have surrendered ourselves into the hands of God. No one is as happy as we are. We have not snatched away anything from anyone and therefore, we are not going to lose anything. But, we will have to realise one thing that whatever adverse circumstances and lawlessness are created, we should not die like worms. We have to learn one thing from Gandhiji and that is fearlessness. We may not know how to face bullets bravely, but we should not run away like cowards. We should learn to defend ourselves by non-violence and if not possible even by violence. Everyone who is born is bound to die. Then, why die like a coward? Why not die like a brave man?”

After the call for ‘Quit India’ was given by Gandhiji, what he said in Ahmedabad to enhance the spirit of the people is noteworthy. “The Japan radio blurts out day in and day out that we do not want even an inch of India’s land. We are fighting to drive away the British. Some of our people have also joined this chorus. They say that this is a matter of patriotism. Subhasbabu is also there. But we should not be guided either by the Japan radio or trust that Russia will help us to win independence. We have resolved that we do not want the help of anybody. Expressing happiness at the prospects of the Japanese coming to India, is an exhibition of slavish mentality. The concept of an independent nation can be one and only one and that is that we should drive away the British and prevent anyone else from taking their place.”

One can realise his foresightedness from the fact that in this very meeting, he had said “You will have to carry on the struggle assuming that Mahatmaji and other leaders will be arrested. You do possess the strength to see that the administration of the British government collapses within 24 hours of the arrest of Gandhiji. You are already familiar with all the methods. Whether someone guides you or not, whether it is your turn or not, you have not to seek anybody’s advice. Don’t remain passive on the plea that you don’t have the next programme. Such unique opportunity for sacrifice of the nation is rare and is not going to come again. Let us not give anybody an opportunity to say that Gandhiji was all alone in his fight for freedom. The entire administration should be brought to standstill by the railwaymen halting the railways, the post and telegraph workers and government servants leaving their jobs, and teachers and students by closing their schools and colleges. In this unique struggle, I appeal to you all to extend your co-operation whole-heartedly”.

On August 9, the Congress Working Committee passed the historical ‘Quit India’ resolution. The address delivered by Sardar at this occasion was almost poetic. He said : “The propaganda of government in foreign countries is that none are with the Congress. It is a body of a few persons who create trouble every other day. Nine crore Muslim population are not with the Congress. Seven crores Harijans are not with the Congress and seven crores of people of Native States’ are also not with the Congress. The wise moderates are not with them. The Radicals, the Democrats and the Communists are also not with the Congress. I assert that nobody is with us but we have with us at least the Britishers who style themselves noble-blooded gentlemen. We are concerned about them only. If the Congress has not the support of the country, then why are you so much afraid of it? Why do you find the ghost of the Congress here, there and everywhere?

We are promised independence after the cessation of the war but how can we have faith in that promise? Where is the guarantee that at the cessation of war, you (Britishers) will be there to give independence to India and whether you will have the power and right to grant such independence! If India is occupied by some

other nation after the war, how can Britain grant independence to India? At present, even when you (Britishers) are in such a critical insecure position if you are behaving in such evasive manner, after winning the war, how would you have the heart to leave India? Are we such fools that we cannot understand this simple little thing?

Don't believe that there will be an understanding with the British Empire. If you believe them, you will be disappointed. There is no question of courting arrest this time and fill the jails. This resolution has not been passed lightly. If you believe that everything will be safe, commerce and industry will continue, at the most, we may have to go to jail, then do not adopt this resolution. But, if you are prepared to welcome the opportunity to sacrifice yourselves in this struggle for independence, then only proceed further. Also remember that whatever is gained therefrom, will be for the entire country. You join this movement, only if you do not want anything for yourselves. So long, as Gandhiji is there, we have to follow whatever orders, instructions or suggestion he offers us. We do not want either to make hurry or to lag behind. Everyone has to obey orders and abide by strict discipline. However if the government takes the initiative and arrests all, then there is no question of taking any step. So long as Gandhiji is there, he will be our leader. If he is arrested, the responsibility will not be on the shoulder of anyone else. The entire responsibility will be that of Britain. The responsibility for chaos will also be that of Britain. The veiled threat of chaos will not defer the country anymore. There is no other alternative. We have to gain independence and not suffer slavery even for a moment."

At the early dawn on August 9, there were mass arrests of Gandhiji, Sardar and members of the Congress Working Committee and the local leaders throughout the country. The members of the Congress Working Committee along with Sardar were kept in the Ahmadnagar Fort. Almost for three years, the doors of that fort remained closed for them.

During this imprisonment, the old intestinal trouble of Sardar gave him a lot of trouble. He became very weak. The attack sometimes continued for seven to nine days. During this period, he

could not sleep for days and the pain was unbearable. He could not take anything except water. As a result of this, he lost weight in the summer of 1943. In 1944, he lost twenty pounds. In 1941, government had released Sardar on the grounds of this very ailment. The disease this time had taken a serious turn however, government did not think it wise that Sardar be examined by his own doctor. It appeared government was in a mood to harrass them to such an extent that it would teach them a lesson for life. One of the hefty members of the Working Committee was released. The inference was that he had lost his will to fight. Sardar did not accept any conditional release or surrender. He had an inherent habit of enduring pain. He considered the body as an instrument which should be under the control of the soul. Consequently, after the end of the second World War, when the Viceroy convened a conference of all parties at Simla and for that purpose, the members of the Congress Working Committee were released from the Ahmadnagar Fort in June 1945, Sardar came out of the jail only with them.

His assertion that one should not die like worms and stray creatures was literally implemented by him. This was his imprisonment. As a shrewd politician, he foresaw that there was no need for any more freedom struggle, and therefore, we should consider and plan for peace and prosperity of the country and its stability thereafter.

After release from the Ahmadnagar Fort, before going to Simla, he went to Panchgani to see Gandhiji. A friend talked about the plan of the next struggle against the British. He, quickly, gave a shrewd reply : “It would not now be necessary to carry on a struggle against Britain. We have now only to help to wind up their affairs neatly and leave us properly. The real struggle will be against communal forces spread in the country and against our own weaknesses.” He became engrossed in planning to fight the communalism which had spread during the three years of the absence of Congress leaders in jail and for making the crumbling administration strong and stable. We know that if one individual can be singled out for his supreme efforts over others for the unity and stability of the country after independence, it was definitely

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Sardar. When he expired in 1950, the entire country mourned his loss and even today, when some adversities are there it is usual to hear from the common man that “This would not have happened had Sardar been alive. He knew how to live and die, honourably and with self-respect.”

A Statesman Par Excellence

The Negotiations with the British Government passed through several stages. In the meantime, the setting-up of the Constituent Assembly was announced. In his capacity as the President of the Congress Parliamentary Board, Sardar with all his drive and energy planned for the election in such a way that the Congress captured 91% of the seats in the non-Muslim constituencies. The Congress ministries were formed in 8 provinces. In two province, a nonleague ministry with the support of the Congress started functioning. The elections made two things quite clear. It established that the Congress had a hold on the Non-Muslim population whereas the Muslim league had a hold on Muslim population. In September 1946, an interim ministry was formed at the Centre under Pandit Nehru. The Muslim League remained aloof and engineered terrible communal riots. The Muslim League joined the ministry later on with an avowed objective of breaking it. While working as Home Minister, Sardar realised very soon that Congress-League coalition will not last long. He also experienced that under instructions from the Communication Minister, Shri Nishtar, their telephones were being tapped. It was suggested at one point that Sardar should take over the finance ministry and hand over the home ministry to the League. But as a man possessing a sound political understanding, Sardar realised that in order to ensure stability in the country, the prime requirement was law and order as well as the smooth running of administration. He also realised that Congress and League will not be able to function jointly and that it would be necessary to accept partition of the country. With the acceptance of this position by Sardar, Lord Mountbatten proceeded further with the idea and got it down the throat of all concerned. The British government agreed to quit India after the

partition of India into India and Pakistan on August 15. On the eve of their departure, the British government made a very sinister announcement that with the departure of the British government, its paramountcy would lapse not only over the British territory but even over the Native States. This meant that as many as 625 small and big Native States would become independent like India and Pakistan. Consequently, the country would be divided into a number of small and big units. This was a very serious challenge to the integrity of the country. The framing of the Constitution of the country was another moot problem. Sardar undertook work on three important fronts namely enforcement of law and order, settling the question of Native States and a suitable Constitution for the country. In all these, his constructive and administrative qualities as also his qualities of leadership and statesmanship manifested themselves fully and bloomed luxuriantly.

As the Union Home Minister, he took up the work of law and order and the establishment of a peaceful atmosphere in the country. He took up the work of reorganising the services and recruited able people as this was the backbone of law and order situation in the country. In a year's time, he set up such a close-knit organisation that he got intelligence from all corners of the country in record time so that he could evolve appropriate strategies based on vital pieces of secret information.

The biggest question in ensuring the stability of the administration was of forging a bridge of faith and confidence with the 'Steel Frame'. Most of the I.C.S. officers suspected that the Congress leaders particularly Sardar in view of his past experiences with the I.C.S. officers, would not have confidence in them, and that they would look upon them with suspicious eyes but Sardar rose to the occasion and took two very important and far-reaching measures. One was to do away the differences between the British I.C.S. officers and the Indian I.C.S. officers. As a result, the British officers returned to their country. He assured the Indian civilians that he did not want to make any changes in their status or emoluments and was not at all averse to them. On the contrary he was prepared to trust. This cleaned the atmosphere and the 'Steel

Frame' responded most enthusiastically. When some unions of the Native States were instituted some popular ministers objected to the appointment of bureaucratic advisors in their unions. In his characteristic way, Sardar told them : "We do not still possess adequate administrative experience and therefore, I myself, take advice from persons like Menon. Under the circumstances why should they shrink away from their taking advice from experienced administrators?" Everyone was quietened and the civilian officers who were present at the meeting were very much pleased and an abiding sense of confidence was created in them which percolated to the others also. Sardar won over this "Steel Frame" through trust and love and infused in them a new enthusiasm which brought about the necessary basic stability in the administration.

Unfortunately, after the partition of the country and because of the mass-scale migration of the population, an unprecedented carnage broke out. Sardar tried his best to bring peace in the disturbed areas of Delhi and outside Delhi. Muslims from West Punjab and Bengal could reach Pakistan via Amritsar which was the stronghold of Sikhs, who were burning with anger because of the attacks on their community in Pakistan. They went to the extent of thinking that not a single Muslim be permitted to reach Pakistan alive via Amritsar. Sardar immediately left for Amritsar and addressing a mammoth rally of 2 lakhs of Sikhs appealed to them in his characteristic way. His simple question, bringing home to them the dire consequences of their action was : "Do you wish that Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan immigrate to India alive or dead? If you want them to be murdered in Pakistan, you may kill these Muslims and be responsible for the death of lakhs of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. If you do so, you will be called murderers of our own people on the other side which is tantamount to homicide. If you wish that all our people from Pakistan, reach India safely, then you give facilities to the Muslims to migrate safely to Pakistan. If you behave otherwise, Hindu and Sikhs in Pakistan will be annihilated." This practical homely approach of Sardar touched the Sikhs immediately and the mass murders of Muslims desiring to go to Pakistan was avoided. Consequently, Hindus from Pakistan also could reach India safely.

Similarly, when he received information that the Hindus of two states of U.P. and Rajasthan were madly excited and the ruler Princes were turning deaf ears. He summoned both these Princes to Delhi and had them with him till the situation became normal. On the other end, he made all necessary arrangements for the establishment of peace and communal harmony through the normal law and order authorities. A lot of misunderstanding was created about him because of his forthright speech and frankness of opinion. In a meeting in Lucknow, he had observed that those who stayed in India should no more look up to Pakistan. It would be simpler if those who thought their future very safe on the other side, should cross over. Because of this, and because of the instructions given by him to blow up a Muslim house in Delhi from where continuous firing was resorted to and the situation went beyond the control of the police, a number of persons complained to Jawahar and Gandhiji regarding his partisan attitude. However, he was working in the best interest of the nation and his conscience was clear, intention beyond doubt. He did not like dubious persons saying one thing and doing the opposite. He used to expose such people in their presence and therefore, it naturally created resentment towards him. However, he was unrivalled in his ability to organise affairs leading to the establishment of communal harmony and this will be remembered for a long time to come.

Simultaneously, he took on hand the most intricate question of the Native States. Attempts were afoot for finalising the standstill agreement with them. This agreement provided that the Central government will be vested with powers of defence, foreign policy and communications even over the states. For achieving this smoothly and quickly, a new Department of states was established and Sardar became its minister and V.P. Menon his Secretary. Travancore, Hyderabad and some other states declared themselves sovereign states and created hurdles in the agreement. On the other end, Jinnah with a view to tempt Jodhpur, Jesalmer and other border states made an unconditional offer to align with Pakistan on their terms. The situation became extremely complicated. In order to find a solution to this, Sardar issued a beautifully worded, highly statesman-like statement addressed to the Princes and removed all

misapprehension and misunderstanding working in the minds of a number of Princes. That statement was a masterpiece and had a historical significance and is worth ruminating by those interested in national integration.

Sardar had observed : “ The states had accepted in principle the Central government’s pre-eminence in respect of defence, foreign relations and communications. In the over-all interests of the nation and the states themselves, we desire no more than accession on these three subjects. All of us have inherited this country with its ancient and worthy civilisation and are proud of this heritage. It is sheer accident that some reside in the states and some are residents of British India but all alike are partners in its culture and civilisation. The same blood flows in our veins and we cherish the same noble feelings maintaining this high tradition is a matter of common interest to all of us. No one can segregate us into small parochial groups, no impassable artificial barriers can be erected between us. It is not at all behoving us to enter into agreements and treaties as is wont with foreign powers. We should sit together as worthy sons of Mother India and mutually agree upon one another’s rights and limitations. In this spirit, I invite all, including the rulers of the states and their people, to the counsels of the Constituent Assembly and decide issues in an atmosphere of close friendliness and co-operation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our great motherland and for the common good of all of us.”

He took the opportunity to assure the Princes that Congress harboured neither prejudice nor enmity towards them but wished them and their subjects all happiness and prosperity. He appealed to their sense of patriotism and reiterated that the new states department in no way, desire to have supremacy over them. “If at all, any sense of supremacy is required, it would be with common understanding and for common good. We are at a momentous stage in the history of India. By common endeavour, we can raise the country to new greatness, while lack of unity will expose us to unexpected calamities. I hope the Indian states will realise fully that if we do not cooperate and work together in the general interest,

anarchy and chaos will overwhelm us all, great and small and lead us to total ruin.”

The statement was acclaimed as highly statesman-like and as a shining example of political sagacity by all politicians. Taking advantage of this favourable reaction, Sardar invited a small group of rulers and their Diwans for a free and frank discussion on July 10, 1947. A resume of this discussion was published to which Jinnah objected. Sardar invited some other Princes and their Diwans on July 24, and the discussions proceeded ahead. As a result of this give and take, whatever doubts lurked in the minds of Princes were removed and the copies of the agreement of accessions as also of the Standstill Agreement were distributed among the Princes. In the meantime, Sardar had won over the support of Lord Mountbatten in this formidable task. Lord Mountbatten had remained present at the meeting. In his effective language, Sardar appealed to the Princes : “Just as you cannot run away from your people for whose welfare you are responsible, in the same way, you cannot run away from your obligations to the Central Government.”

By July 31, the discussion resulted in the satisfaction of both the parties and signing of the Instrument of Accession started one by one. There was a popular agitation in Travancore but the state acceded to India. The Nawab of Bhopal could not gulp all this but when he realised that there was no other alternative, he sent the instrument of accession duly signed alongwith a letter to Sardar. The letter frankly admitted : “I do not wish to hide the fact that I used all the sources at my disposal for the preservation of my state’s independence and neutrality during my struggle against accession to the Indian Union. I now accept my defeat and am confident that hereafter you will find in me as faithful and true a friend as I was your strong opponent in the past. I do not harbour any ill-feelings towards anybody. From the beginning, I should admit that I have experienced respectful and courteous behaviour from you right from the beginning and now want to assure you that as long as you will take a firm action against disruptive elements in the country and so

long as your attitudes towards the state will be friendly, I will remain your true friend.”

In a nobler response to this, Sardar observed : “I do not honestly believe that we are victorious and you are defeated. Ultimately, what was true and proper has happened. In that process, both of us have played our due part. I am very much pleased at your assurance that you will render assistance in eradicating the disruptive elements in the country without distinction of caste, creed or religion. Your assurance to remain a faithful and true friend of the Indian Union has also pleased me. You deserve all congratulations for your honesty, courage and brave attitude realising the seriousness of the situation pretty well and abandoning your previous attitude which was against the over-all interest and welfare of our great country.”

Thereafter, Indore, Jodhpur and others followed suit. Even by August 15, Hyderabad kept aloof. Hence, Lord Mountbatten himself started negotiations. At one stage, it appeared that there was a settlement but Nizam found himself helpless against the pressures of Razakars. The Razakars started the harassment of the local public. The funds of Nizam particularly in the foreign banks, were misused. Nizam lodged a complaint to UNO. Thus, when the situation went out of control, Sardar with the consent of the Governor-General, initiated police action. In 108 hours, the Nizam surrendered and Hyderabad acceded and merged with India. The Nawab of Junagar bh had accepted an accession with Pakistan. Sardar solved this knotty problem in his own inimitable way with determination, timely action and statesmanship and Junagarh became an integral part of India.

While on the one hand, he was handling the intricate question of the Native States successfully, on the other he paid due attention to the question of communal harmony, the law and order situation and the working of the Constituent Assembly. The sub-committees of the Constituent Assembly, were strategically very important. In these committees, the conflicting views were reconciled and unity was established. Sardar played a very decisive and leading role in these committees. In the committee on Fundamental Rights, some

believed that there should be no impediment whatsoever to individual freedom. Sardar smilingly observed “Imagine what would happen if we did not provide some check on the Press, lathis and firing.” Consequently, the right of the government to curb unruly elements those in Telangana which evidently were a menace to the society and the nation were accepted. Similarly, the question about right to property proved a vexed one. Sardar handled the controversy of paying due compensation so well that the property was accepted and the decision of the court in the matter of compensation was considered final. The Sardar’s wisdom got the better of the situation and the heat that was generated cooled off.

However, the unique example of his understanding and foresight which was evident in his handling of the merger of the states was also equally evident in the Minorities Committee. The British government during the earlier four decades had given special right and separate constituencies to some minorities and had thus established vested interests. They naturally wanted to maintain status quo and uphold their prestige. Sardar had unlimited sympathy towards minorities. In fact, he had done his best for the welfare of all and was doing so. But, separate electorates were, in the words of Lord Morley, trees of poison. He with all the tact and persuasiveness convinced the minority sub-committee about this and decided by majority to do away with separate electorates. Thereafter, he started discussions individually with minority leaders. To begin with, he took into the confidence the leader of the Indian Christian Community, Dr. H.C. Mukerjee. When he accepted joint-electorates, Sardar conferred with the representative of the Parsis, Sir Homi Modi. Sir Modi pleaded for a proper representation to the Parsi community having regard to their small number and their progressive outlook. Sardar pointed out that the Parsis would on their own merit get representation because of their progressive attitude and service to the nation. Consequently, Sir Homi withdrew his proposal for separate electorates for Parsis. Then, Sardar held discussions with the Anglo-Indian leader Shri Frank Anthony. He also agreed and Sardar had a round of discussions with the representatives of the Sikhs. There were several doubts in their minds, but the persuasiveness of Sardar proved very fruitful and

he was able to convince Sardar Baldev Singh and Sardar Ujjaval Singh to drop the question of separate electorates. Then, Sardar took up the question of Muslims. They had enjoyed the rights of separate electorates since 1907. He pointed out to them that in spite of these facilities, their voice as a minority had not been as effective as expected. Several Muslim leaders insisted on separate electorates but Begum Aizaz Rasul put a brave front in the Constituent Assembly and proposed to do away with separate electorates. The Constituent Assembly, accepted the proposal to continue the arrangement arrived at under the Poona Act for 10 more years and simultaneously, incorporated the provision declaring untouchability a positive breach of law.

After this, Sardar resolved successfully two demands of the minorities with his usual alacrity and tact. One was about reservation of seats in the ministries for minority and the other reservation of percentage in the public services. In both these matters, Sardar explained the need to rely on traditions and pointed out the possible difficulties in making legal provision in the constitution. This was acceptable to all. A sizable group was of the opinion that the election of the President of India should be by members of the Parliament only. Sardar handled this matter very deftly and set up a joint electorate of Parliament and Legislative Assembly members and gave national status to this. Such a happy ending was possible because of Sardar's own resourcefulness.

All these measures had far-reaching and beneficial effects and will be remembered for a long time in the history of India but the merger of the Native States –an unprecedented happening will go down in the world history in golden letters. On learning this, the then Prime Minister of U.S.S.R. Mr. Krushchev told the Indian Ambassdor Shri K.P.S. Menon : “You Indians are wonderful people. How did you manage to liquidate the Princes without liquidating the Native States?” The credit for this wonder of wonders goes to Sardar Patel.

When the Cabinet Mission announced their Government's decision to quit India and abolish the paramountcy over the Native States, these grew restive. There were 26 small states in Orissa and

15 in Chattisgarh. These areas had mines and forests. The administration of these areas was mostly carried out by the political agents of the British government. Some states established an association known as the Eastern States' Union. This association could not function for long because every state was yearning for paramountcy and the people wanted responsible administration. Thereafter, there was a conflict, between the Princes and the people. In this conflict, the Princes managed to portray 'Hirakud' Dam as an instrument of evil and excited the Adivasis. Consequently, anybody other than Adivasis entering the forest was shot by arrows. The Chief Minister of Orissa, Dr. Harekrishna Mehtab used to send reports about this deteriorating situation but because of more demanding pressure, due attention could not be paid to it. In the meantime, political agent so contrived that the Nizam obtained a lease for an iron belt of 100 miles from the Prince of Basir on a lease of 100 years. It was also secretly arranged that he would be a partner in this deal. On learning about this from his Intelligence Service Sardar called for the file on the subject. With great difficulty the file could be traced. Sardar then invited the young Prince of Basir, Shri Pravirchandra to Delhi and warned him to extricate himself from this deal. The ruler understood but out of this little episode, Sardar quickly realised the need for a permanent solution to this question. The state ministry proposed that the Native States in Orissa should be merged in Orissa and those in Chattisgarh should be merged in Madhya Pradesh. This was acceptable to Sardar but the consent of the states was necessary for this. To achieve this purpose, Sardar moved his ministry to prepare a formula for privy purses for the Princes and held informal discussion about this with some chief ministers and rulers of Native States. In this discussion, Sardar realised that the proposal was likely to be accepted. Consequently, Sardar convened a meeting of the rulers of the Native States, ministers and officers of the government of India on December 13, 1947 at Cuttack, the capital of Orissa. In the inaugural address, Sardar spoke with such affection, feeling and frankness that whatever fear the Princes harboured was removed. The demand for a responsible administration was already made by the people. One of the rulers inquired whether he could contest the election.

Sardar replied in the affirmative. The rulers felt that if they did not accept the reasonable proposal of the Central Government, and if the agitation of the people was intensified, they would be thrown away and would lose both the privy purse and the right to contest the election. They, therefore, wisely accepted the proposal of the Sardar for merger. Chhattisgarh followed Orissa. Thus the process of merger started in 35,000 square miles of area with a population of 80 lakhs. When Gandhiji heard about this, he remarked in a jestful mood that the merger of the state was akin to giving a purgative to a child suffering from indigestion. In all this, ultimately, the interests of the rulers had been served.

In Saurashtra there were 14 big states, 119 small states and other units under different administration, totalling 860. Till then they had the backing of the British Government, in the maintenance of law and order but the situation had changed now. The citizens who were subjugated so long, came out defiantly, and took possession of all state offices forcibly. In this situation, the wise ruler of Bhavnagar approached Gandhiji and asked for guidance about people's participation in the administration. Gandhiji sent him to Sardar. With the blessings of Sardar, a popular ministry was formed in Bhavnagar. Born out of this, was the scheme for various states and ultimately, the Saurashtra Union was established. After that, Sardar took on hand the question of Kolhapur and Vadodara. The ruler of Vadodara did not fall in line easily but Sardar took action with a firm hand and settled the issue. After that, state after state started acceding to the Indian Union. Sardar, then, thought of Madhya Bharat. One after the other, Gwalior, Indore, Dhar, Dewas all accepted the advice of Sardar. Rajputana states followed suit. The Sikh state of Punjab also cooperated in the merger.

The question of Kashmir became extremely complicated. The Pakistani aggressors attacked the state and the ruler sought the support and protection of India. With utmost speed, the Indian government sent their armies to the rescue of Kashmir and saved it. A popular ministry was formed under the leadership of Shaikh Abdulla. Pandit Nehru then on the advice of Lord Mountbatten entrusted the question of Kashmir to UNO. It is now well known

through Sardar's correspondence that he did not favour this war. The consequent worries the country has faced, proves his foresight.

Sardar became extremely alert. The Diwan of Travancore, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was dreaming of paramountcy. Sardar told him many bitter truths and ultimately, Travancore, Kochin, Mysore and other states accepted the advice of Sardar. Thereafter, the question of Hyderabad alone remained unsolved in the entire country. The Razakars and the supporters of Pakistan were pressing the Nizam of Hyderabad to retain his paramountcy. The Razakars taking law and order into their own hands, created an unsafe atmosphere. It appeared that no useful purpose would be served by mere negotiations and therefore, Sardar with the consent of the Governor-General, Rajaji and mostly on his own responsibility took police action and resolved the problem of Hyderabad. Thus, the 'Yagna' for establishment of a united India undertaken by Sardar was completed with the merger of Hyderabad. Politically, India became one and united. In the history of the country stretched over ages, India became united for the first time and that too without shedding a drop of blood. The sterling qualities of leadership he had shown as leader of Satyagraha flowered in a much greater way in the administration of the country, maintenance of law and order and ensuing stability of the country. He received due appreciation from the country and the world. The strange fact was that he won the hearts of the rulers of the Native States, who lost their princedoms. He earned the faith and love of the same rulers who, before independence, feared him and looked upon him with disdain. The Sanskrit saying : "Harsh like a thunderbolt yet soft like a flower" came true in the case of Sardar in all its bearings and interpretations.

“O Lord, I Am In Your Hands”

A Herculean task of making the country strong and powerful prior to and after independence had its effect on the health of Sardar. He survived only with indomitable self-will. His intestinal malady and constipation always troubled him. Sardar with self-respect and discipline during his long imprisonment, did not expect any favour from government. Consequently, he suffered the pain silently. He was very much run down when he was released from the Ahmednagar Fort, though he got himself involved enthusiastically in various activities immediately afterwards. In the Central Cabinet, the most difficult and the most successful task was his. On the assassination of Mahatmaji, he broke down as a result of the allegations of his instrumentality in the association of his life-time Guru. Thereafter, he suffered several heartattacks small and big. His worries also increased. Consequently, the body of this iron-man became weaker. He took rest in Dehradun and Mussourie, but even during period of rest, he worked and put an end to the perversity of the Maharaja of Vadodara and issuing a fitting reply to the mischievous statement of Churchill by paying him in the same coin. After recovery, he returned to Delhi but fell ill again. The doctors advised that the climate of Bombay would be more suitable than that of Delhi following which he was brought to Bombay by a special plane on December 12, 1950. Before leaving Delhi, Sardar realised that the end was near. He had told one of his close associates that life was coming to an end.

He bade good-bye to President Rajendrababu, Prime Minister Jawaharlal and others and reached Bombay. On Wednesday, his pain reduced but on the morning of Thursday, it increased and he spent the night and day in utter restlessness. The heart-attack on Friday, the 15th proved fatal. On hearing the sad news the entire nation mourned. All leaders and elders reached Bombay and in the

presence of lakhs of people, his body was cremated. The entire country paid rich tributes to its beloved iron-man.

This worthy son of the nation endeavoured to impart unity and solidarity to the country. He also set an excellent example of parliamentary proceedings and behaviour in our new democracy. Except when his health did not permit, he always remained present in the Parliament. He listened to the criticism against him with a calm and cool mind, and expressed his viewpoints with all seriousness and tried to satisfy the house. In spite of his seriousness, he was always full of wit and humour. Human weaknesses were a target of his long-abiding humour. Mahadevbhai has noted that when he was with Gandhiji, in Yaravada prison on many occasions he used to make others laugh. He made use of this art in Parliament and made many realise their true position.

For 32 years Sardar served the Congress, the country and Mahatmaji faithfully and single-heartedly. He had to face several complex situations during this period. All along, he was vigilant that no harm was done to the country or the Congress. When in 1941, his close friend Rajaji issued a statement against the resolution of the Working Committee and carried a propaganda about Pakistan, as a conscience keeper of the Congress, he lost no time in demanding the resignation of Rajaji from the Congress. All along the freedom struggle, he braved attacks from the Government and the critics; but like a true Sardar, he always remained on the forefront. He suffered the wrath, personal enmity and displeasure of many. He, willingly and with due understanding stood this poison so that the country gained a well-knit organisation in the Congress and the country stood united in peace and war.

He was lonely after the sad, unexpected demise of Gandhiji. He used to open his heart before Gandhiji and Gandhiji also understood him completely with the result that there was hardly any misunderstanding between them. The absence of Gandhiji, therefore, was felt by him acutely. He survived during this period, due to his absolute faith in God. Many people believed that an activity-oriented man like Sardar would hardly possess an unshakable faith in God. His close friends knew very well that the

anchor of his faith in life was his faith in God. This faith is visible in his speeches during the last 10-15 years of his life. In last days and his last moments in Bombay, he remembered God incessantly and continuously prayed, “O Lord, I am in Your Hands.” God also looked after him very well and saw that his last moments were grand and prestigious. People remember him often years after his death. It is in this context that one should appreciate what one occasionally and often hears. “How different it would have been if Sardar were alive!”

Chronology

(1875-1950)

1875 October 31	:	Born at Nadiad, Gujarat.
1891	:	Married at the age of 16 to Zaverbai.
1897	:	Passed matriculation examination from Nadiad High School
1902	:	Moved on to Borsad.
1904 April	:	His daughter Manibehn born.
1905 November	:	His son Dahyabhai born.
1909 January 11	:	Wife, Zaverbai expired.
1910 August	:	Sailed for England.
1913 February 13	:	After obtaining his Bar-at-Law returned to India. Landed at Bombay.
1917	:	Elected for the first time as a Municipal Councillor in Ahmedabad.
1917	:	Elected Secretary of the Gujarat Sabha.
1917 November	:	Came in direct contact with Gandhiji for the first time when the first Gujarat Political Conference was held at Godhra under Gandhiji.
1917-18	:	Took up the relief work for the affected persons from famine in Ahmedabad.
1918	:	Established a special hospital in Bhagubhai Vanda and arranged to distribute medicines at the homes of

the affected patients from influenza in Ahmedabad.

- 1918 March 30 : Addressed the meeting of the farmers.
- 1920 July 11 : Executive Committee of the Gujarat Political Conference met at Nadiad and at his instance, resolution was passed supporting non-cooperation.
- 1921 Summer : Started putting on 'Khaddar' clothes.
- 1921 December : Elected Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Ahmedabad Congress Session.
- 1923 August 19 : Took out a procession along with National Flag (Nagpur Flag Satyagraha).
- 1923 December 2 : Convened the Taluka Conference at Borsad.
- 1924 : Established his own party, contested elections, captured 35 out of 48 seats of the Committee of Management of the Ahmedabad Municipality. Accepted the responsibility as its President.
- 1924-28 : Was Chairman of the Municipal Committee Ahmedabad.
- 1927 July : Took up the relief work for the affected people from floods.
- 1928 : Organised flood relief in Gujarat.
- 1928 February 4 : A convention of the farmers of eight villages was held under him (Bardoli Movement).
- 1929 March (last week) : Kathiawad Political Conference (5th) was convened at Morbi under him.
- 1929 May : Nominated as President of the Maharashtra Political Conference.
- 1930 March 7 : Arrested.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

1930 March 7 to April 22	:	For the first time in life he wrote his diary in Jail.
1930 June 26	:	Released from Jail.
1930 July 31	:	Arrested and was sentenced imprisonment and sent to Yarvada prison.
1931 March	:	Elected President at Karachi session of the Indian National Congress.
1932 January - 1933 May	:	Was lodged with Gandhiji in Yarvada Jail and were together there for sixteen months.
1932 November	:	Mother expired when he was in Yarvada Jail.
1933 June 23	:	Wrote to Gandhiji and explained about his nose trouble.
1933 October 20	:	Elder brother Vitthalbhai Patel expired in Vienna.
1934	:	When Gandhiji wanted funds to be raised for the cause of the Harijans, it was he who raised them.
1934 July	:	Released from imprisonment.
1935-40	:	Was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress.
1935 November	:	Third Local Self-Government Conference was held under him.
1940 November 1	:	Arrested.
1941	:	Actively participated in the Individual Satyagraha.
1941	:	Released.
1941 August 20	:	Arrested.
1941 August 20	:	Released.
1942 August 9	:	Address delivered at the Congress Working Committee when it passed the historical 'Quit India Resolution'.

1942 August 9	:	Arrested and detained in the Ahmedabad Fort.
1945	:	Released from Jail.
1946 September 2	:	Joined Nehru's Interim National Government as Minister of Home Affairs and of Information and Broadcasting.
1947 December 13	:	Convened a meeting of the rulers of the Native States, ministers and officers of the Government of India at Cuttack. Delivered inaugural address.
1948 December	:	Became Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India after independence and held the posts till his death.
1950 December 12	:	Brought to Bombay by a special plane from Delhi.
1950 December 15	:	Died of heart attack.
1991	:	Awarded the <i>Bharat Ratna</i> posthumously

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel consolidated the country into one united whole in a unique manner after independence. He was a man of iron will and absolute fearlessness. He tackled the question of more than 500 Native States, territories and principalities in a masterly strategic manner. He was a great statesman and humanitarian administrator who did social work by not spending tonnes of money in relief work.

I.J.Patel worked as the Vice Chancellor of Sardar Patel University, Vidyanagar (Gujarat). He wrote many biographies, many of them got prestigious awards.

